JUNE 35 Cents

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

a new story by
CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG
And Already Lost...

ROBERT BLOCH
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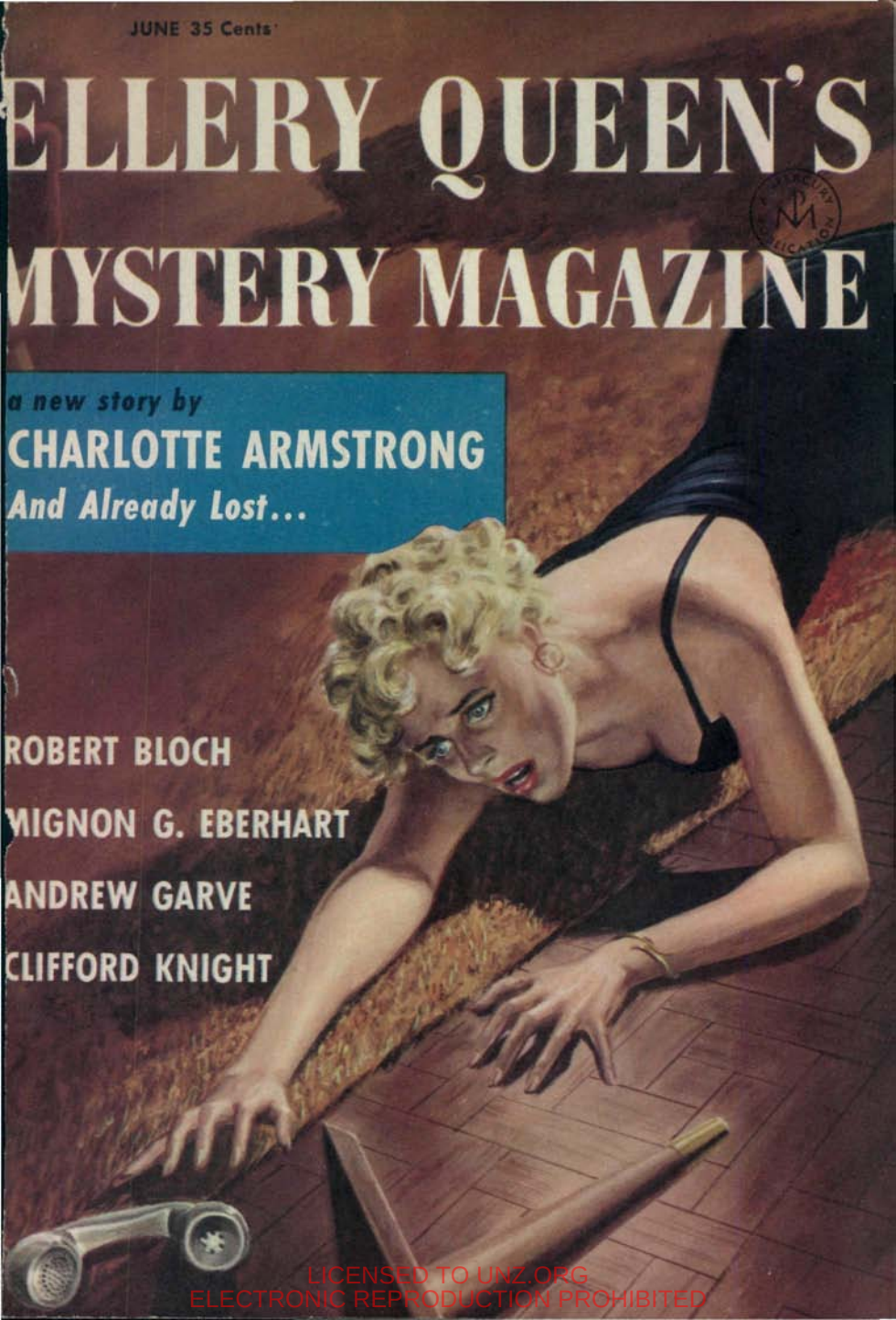

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG**

TITLE: ***And Already Lost . . .***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: A town in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *How an aging spinster schoolteacher, the assistant principal of High School, battled with The Unholy Four—Miss Delphine Murphy versus four nonconformist seniors . . . a brilliant story of loyalties in conflict, of a woman who had the courage of her principles.*

MISS MURPHY OFTEN MADE REASONS to be in the corridor—when the four of them were due to come by. She knew their schedules. She could anticipate. She was to be found, looking vague, with papers in her hand, just turning into Mr. Madden's office, or perhaps just leaving her own, and she would hesitate and frown and pretend to be preoccupied; but her pale green eyes under dust-colored lashes would secretly watch them. After they had passed, she would go about her business, concealing the depth of her pleasure.

As assistant principal of the High School, she ought to have been, without exception, on the side of society. But when the four of them went by in their inevitable formation, something lively and stubborn and sly, something that contradicted everything Miss Murphy lived by, lifted up a voice to say inside her, "Nevertheless, this is magnificent!"

Miss Murphy was a little woman who had looked about the same age for the last fifteen years—ever since she had first lost the bloom of youth. She was a pale redhead, with pale freckled skin, and the flesh of her face did not cling cleanly to the bones; it was rather doughy and lumpy, as if a sculptor had thrown clay on the framework in careless preliminary and then never had got around to refining his work. Miss

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Murphy was everything law-abiding, anxious, and reliable. She was destined to be "good old Miss Murphy," and she knew this and was even rather pleased about it. What was it in her that responded? What clapped impious applause in her heart—to see the four of them go by?

Miss Murphy was not, of course, the only one who watched them in their peculiar habit of march—that strange phenomenon—and pretended not to see it. New students were sometimes impelled to jeer in astonishment, but they soon learned that it was better not to notice.

The faculty, the principal's office staff, the adults—all deplored but could not forbid the walking ritual. It was simply four seniors walking by. That was all. In their passage they did nothing against the rules. But they did do something. And they did it in the long corridors of the school between classes, whenever all four were able to travel together in the same direction. And on the campus too—sometimes when they arrived in the morning, and every day as they departed. The four of them—the girl and the three boys . . .

One spring Tuesday, just before the end of fourth period, Miss Murphy found herself compulsively gathering up a packet of record cards. In a moment the bell would ring, the individual cells of the orderly hive would erupt, and there would be the periodical roar of voices, thump of feet, and rush of bodies. Miss Murphy knew she was deliberately waiting out the necessary minutes before The Four would pass her door. She rested her wrists on the edge of her desk, the record cards loosely held but ready in her hands, and her quiet waiting like meditation before a dubious god.

When the clock had moved enough, she rose and opened her door. She did not step out into the humming traffic. She stood still and began to sort the cards.

They were coming. She knew because the hum lessened. The Four traveled in a shell of lesser noise.

It was always exactly the same. First, by a single step, came the girl, Ivy Vole. She was tall. She had a small head held high on a neck that was disproportionately thick. Her forehead was rounded and high, and her dark hair went straight back from this bold brow to hang in a limp mass between her shoulder blades. She walked proudly on small feet that almost crossed over each other to follow a straight line and create a swagger in her narrow hips. Ivy Vole looked dead ahead, her eyes like a sleepwalker's. This was the strange, the subtly evil thing. Although she led the pack, she walked as if she was also its prisoner.

A step behind her and a step to the left loomed Stan Fuller, constituting himself a wall at her back. He was taller than she, a fierce burly boy. His dark frown went over

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her left shoulder to warn anyone from interfering, from crossing their immediate path.

Ranging on the flanks were Ross and Tentor. Greyhounds both, they slouched loosely along, their heads held forward, restless, turning, fending, guarding. Ross, with his long, straight, slick blond hair, his predatory nose, his narrow eyes, walked on the left, his feet even with Stan's but the forward bend of his torso and neck guarding the girl. Tentor, a less blond version with a nose less sharp and eyes that were always puffed and sleepy—as if he never slept at night but engaged instead in some nameless dissipation—Tentor ranged on the right flank; in the pattern, he walked on the halfway line, a bit ahead of the other two boys, and half a step behind the girl.

In this curious phalanx they swept along. If anyone chanced or dared to stand in their path, the whole formation could veer without altering their relative positions. The girl simply kept stepping in that strange, proud, blind way of hers, and the three escorts kept bulking, just behind—as if The Four defied all who might break them apart even when, as a unit and quite flexibly, they yielded and then threaded through. The sweep and rhythm, the rigidity of their march—and something in their cold eyes—made it unnecessary for them to swerve very often.

When they had gone by, Miss Murphy feigned a decision, closed her hand around the cards, and turned toward the principal's office. The little shivering ride along her nerves was like the effects of a drug she took in secret.

Wasn't there an integrity in them? In their very scorn? In the imperial air itself—the nerve it took, the calm arrogance of their strange and self-sufficient alliance, the very coldness of their eyes? Was this not somehow magnificent? What would it be to live like that? To have no truck with a thousand nervous little conformities, to resign from the anxiety to please those in authority, to walk so proudly, to be like Ivy Vole, Queen and Head Slave, of however small a kingdom, however evil? What could goodness, civilization, propriety, offer that could compare . . . ?

Mr. Madden came up behind her. "Coming to see me? After you, Miss Murphy."

She had an uneasy feeling that she had been caught this time.

The principal sat down behind his desk. He was a thin man, with a stiff body and stiff white hair. He took off his glasses and massaged his eyes. "How I wish we could reach those four," he sighed, "before we lose them. Do you have any ideas, Miss Murphy?"

"I? Why, no, I'm afraid not," she said, knowing that she had indeed been caught since he spoke directly of what he knew was in her mind. "I have these for your file, sir."

He did not even look at the

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cards. "Have you ever tried to get at them individually?"

"I think everyone has tried," she said in her bright everyday voice.

Privately she didn't think it was any use. For taken one by one, neither the girl nor any of the three boys was formidable. Ivy Vole was of no importance in the school's society. She was an indifferent student, and did not compete in any of the usual ways. None of the boys were competing athletes, none of them politicians or joiners. It was their alliance alone that gave them identity. And the alliance was old. She seemed to remember its taking shape during the last quarter of their freshman year. Now they were seniors. So the alliance was old and it was strong and Miss Murphy did not think that Mr. Madden or any of his staff could break it up before Spring came.

"If we do not help them . . ." He shook his head.

Help them? thought Miss Murphy. Help them to what? To obscurity and a humbler place? After this strange, almost mystic thing that gives them status?

"I am asking your advice because it seems to me—I don't quite know how to put this, Miss Murphy—but it seems to me that *your* approach might be a little different."

Miss Murphy flushed. "It's true that I have tried very hard to understand them—from their point of view," she said tolerantly.

"Yes?" he said.

Sometimes Miss Murphy shuddered to think of any possible point of view for the girl, Ivy . . . or of her possible relationship with those three males, which could scarcely be that of three parfait gentle knights to a fair lady. But this was only one facet of the problem. Not much had been proved against the four this year, although much was believed and even more suspected. They were almost certainly still vandals. The year before they had been caught twice, lectured, and let off. This year they had learned how not to leave any clues behind them. They were bullies, of course, and had been openly so last year. This year they were more skillful, using pressure and threats instead of blows.

Nevertheless, Miss Murphy said earnestly, "Mr. Madden . . . separately they aren't significant. They have welded themselves into this unit because *it* gives them *meaning*."

"I don't like the meaning," he interrupted sharply.

"No, no, of course not," she said hastily, "but just the same they have some qualities we *can* admire."

"And what are those?" the principal asked flatly.

"They are loyal to each other."

"Are they? Have they ever been really tested?"

"They show," said Miss Murphy, "a certain courage."

"Many criminals have courage," said Mr. Madden, "and often they have power—and power is glamorous."

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It was a fair hit and Miss Murphy knew she was blushing.

"And these four," the principal went on, "have achieved a certain amount of power *and* glamor. Tell me how to jolt them out of that. Tell me how to make them substitute the kind of power and glamor that one has to work for—for fifty years."

Miss Murphy found herself thinking: Yes, you can work for it and *hard* for fifty years, or a hundred years, and never get it. And then she thought: Just the same, there is something strong and bold and magnificent—about *taking* it. Taking it *now*.

"I've talked to their families myself," the principal was saying wearily, "and it got nowhere. The parents simply do not *know*. Ivy's mother and father think of her as a perfectly ordinary young girl, not too bright, not too enthusiastic, not doing too well in her studies . . . but 'popular.' Lord help us! Stan's father thinks he is grown up and is quite complacent about it. 'Let the kid alone,' *he* says. Ross's folks are financially harassed this year and they are so frantically absorbed in their troubles that the boy goes almost unnoticed. He merely appends to them. As for Tentor, he lives with grandparents who write him off in one sentence. He is seventeen. They were once seventeen, and they survived. They expect him to do the same."

He sighed and raised his eyes to her. "So they've grown up like weeds. And we have failed them. I wish you could tell me how to change the wrong and rotten things inside them."

"They defy the group," she stammered, "they don't conform."

He stared at her and said, "My soul, my soul . . . if only that were all." Then he got out of his chair and shook off that moment of despair. "I will tell you this," he said. "The moment, if it ever comes, that they are caught red-handed, I will do all I can to blacken their records. I will feed them into the hands of juvenile experts and police psychiatrists. I can afford no more weak and hopeful *wishes* about these four. There isn't time."

He smiled at her to let down the tension. "Thanks, anyway," he said gently.

Miss Murphy went away in some confusion.

Just the same, just the same, her mind kept saying. The four of them are so strong. The world, she thought, will use them, just as they are—out there where the wicked sometimes flourish like the green bay tree.

She did not think the school could change them any more. She herself would miss the sight of them. The school would miss something when next year the four would not be back.

Miss Murphy wished she could, in the few weeks remaining, make contact with them. What she had

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long tried to do was to project to them the friendly, give-and-take attitude she proffered to other students . . . even as they looked through her with those icy eyes. Their eyes could pass over you so blankly that you wanted to pinch yourself. Maybe she had been wrong not to betray how she felt, how she *truly* understood them.

But maybe some day, somehow, and yet . . . she *could* reach them—without any motive to change them. There was a wicked excitement in the very thought.

Miss Murphy lived with her widowed sister, Diane, who was not well and in Miss Murphy's memory never had been. Diane was weak and low that evening. She had been sitting in the sun and had received an irritation of the skin. It was one of the misfortunes of Diane that nature never did her any good. Sun, air, wind—all these usually turned out to have harmed her delicate sensibilities.

About a quarter of nine Diane discovered that her peach-colored pills had run out—the ones she took before bed. So Miss Murphy set out for the neighborhood drug store, with her normal willingness to serve.

It was a pleasant evening and she enjoyed walking the few blocks, looking into other people's houses now that the lights were on, glimpsing a bridge game or a lonely TV watcher or a family dinner party lingering late at table because everyone was reluctant to leave the quips and the teasings to wash the dishes. Miss Murphy enjoyed her pleasant suburban world.

The little cluster of shops was darkened. Only the drug store was still open at this hour. Miss Murphy had a cheerful exchange of commonplaces with the clerk, received her package, and left with a polite "Good night."

But as she drew near the dark and silent gas station, she began to wonder about Diane's lotion. Was that low, too? From old experience, Miss Murphy felt she had better call up home and ask. For the drug store was about to close, at nine o'clock, and she would not be able to return tonight . . .

So Miss Murphy, both kind and shrewd in the matter, left the sidewalk, stepped into the green phone booth and stood against the stucco outside wall of the service station.

As she pulled the thin flaps of the door shut, the light failed to go on but, after firming the door as best she could, Miss Murphy thought nothing of the semi-darkness and hopefully put her dime in.

Nothing happened. The phone was dead. It must be out of order. Turning her mind to the prospect of going back and calling from the drug store itself, Miss Murphy took a full minute to discover and realize that she could not open the door of the booth. It was out of order, too, in a very stubborn way. She could not get out; she was imprisoned in

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this upright coffin with no way to telephone for help.

It was a ridiculous entrapment.

Nine o'clock of a spring evening and Miss Delphine Murphy had got herself locked into a telephone booth!

Peering out through the glass, she fought a sudden feeling of suffocation which was purely subjective. She could tell by reflections on the sidewalk that some of the lights in the drug store were going out. Then she was able to make out the figure of the clerk, as he emerged and locked the door. Miss Murphy rapped on the glass with the metal clasp of her purse, making all the noise she decorously could, but he strode away in the opposite direction.

Never in her life had Miss Murphy been in a position to cry out for help, to lift up her voice. She couldn't decide what to shout. To shout "Help" seemed quaint and ridiculous, like something out of a comic strip. Nevertheless, she had to shout something, so she called, "Hi . . . hi . . . hi there!" The clerk vanished in the reaches of the parking lot at the other side of the drug store, and in a little while his car rattled out into the street and turned to go off the other way, so that it did not pass her. Now the whole small business section was abed for the night.

Traffic on the street was rather thin. Miss Murphy was not in absolute darkness because the street light was shedding down on the gas station corner. But neither was she very visible in her little prison, and the passing cars paid no attention to the fact that the door to the phone booth was shut. Perhaps they could not even see that this was so.

Miss Murphy resolved that she must take the desperate measure of breaking the glass. It was a shock to discover that she could not break it, that the glass was very tough, and besides, had a wire mesh embedded in it. When the heel of her shoe had no more effect than had her elbow, she began to be afraid.

The fear whistled around her head like a bird and lit upon the name of her sister, Diane. Miss Murphy had the medicine. Diane was alone and not feeling well and was easily visited by swarms of wild dreads and melodramatic forebodings. Diane would miss her soon. Diane would think that something terrible had happened to her. Diane would know that her sister never deliberately delayed her return with the medicine. So Diane would be frantic, and to be frantic was very bad for her.

Miss Murphy felt frantic for Diane's sake. But after a minute or two, she knew she was frantic for herself. She was feeling claustrophobic. How was she going to get out . . . *get out* . . . the words began to shout in her consciousness . . . *GET OUT!*

She caught herself turning and twisting and pounding unreasonably

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on the glass when there was no one who could possibly hear her. Miss Murphy took hold of herself and tried to think. The thing to do was stop someone. There did not seem to be any pedestrians. But there were cars. How could she stop a car? Peering with her cheek tight on the cold glass, Miss Murphy saw a convertible come gliding down the street. It was cruising, going softly. It seemed, almost, as if this car, in the gentle evening, in the quiet streets of the town, was looking for trouble.

Miss Murphy rapped on the glass and cried, "Hi! Hi! Hi!"

As the car went by, she saw who was in it.

Stan Fuller was driving. The car —no cheap rattletrap of a jalopy, but a modern, shining, expensive car—was his. It was hard to say how the kids got these cars—they just did. It seemed that the intense desire, the absolute necessity of the young American to own a car, generated its own fulfillment. Stan Fuller sat behind the wheel but it was as if the common agreement of the four of them directed the car's prowling. Ivy Vole sat in the middle and on the edge of the front seat, a little forward of the others, as was her assigned position. Tentor sat on her right, cooly watching and guarding. Ross, who belonged on the left, was draped across the back of the seat behind Stan where he could project his watchfulness to the left, as was his usual station.

Miss Murphy saw them go by, saw Stan and Ivy hold their heads to look straight forward, saw only Tentor peering to the right where she was so helplessly hidden.

The sight of the four of them, on the prowl in a car, intrigued her briefly. But she was not out of her prison and she could not think how to get out.

In about four minutes she was astonished to see the convertible approach once more and from the same direction, as if it had circled the block.

Then she was thrilled when it rocked gently over the break in the gutter and slipped onto the pavement of the service station. It rolled into the shadow of the laundry building that was next to the gas station. It stopped. The four of them sat there.

Miss Murphy, filled with relief and also with the shame of being caught, especially by them, in so undignified a situation, tapped primly upon the glass. She called out, "The door is jammed. Stan? Would you please try to open it? This is Miss Murphy. Jim Tentor? Ivy?"

They did not seem to hear her.

Miss Murphy kept on tapping and calling to them, repeating and repeating in a curious suspension of her own attention. She chose not to notice how much time was going by. But at last her wrist weakened and felt tired and her hand fell and her voice failed. She could see their heads. She began to think she could

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see their cold eyes, as cold and baleful as wolves'. She saw Stan put one huge foot up and hang it by the ankle over the side of the car. She knew Ross has relaxed, for he had nothing to watch on the left but the brick wall of the laundry. She saw Tentor, his neck arched, watching the street behind them. Ivy sat with her head high. Ivy lit a cigarette. The Four seemed to have settled themselves, as if this were a drive-in movie. Were they going to sit there and watch Miss Murphy turning in her trap?

She did turn. She revolved in her cage. She tried the phone again. But nothing had happened to put it suddenly and obligingly back in working order. She braced herself to make no more appeals, to wait with some kind of dignity.

But the thought of Diane came again and she felt her nerve crack, her dignity wash out in rage.

"Listen!" she cried. "*Listen* to me. My sister is ill. I have her medicine with me. I must get out. My sister is ill. Don't you hear me—my sister needs her medicine! *Medicine!*" It should have moved them, the appeal to medical necessity. It always did among the civilized. Didn't planes fly with the serums, ambulances race, cops clear the way to the hospital?

But The Four were not moved.

In a kind of last grasp at reason, Miss Murphy supposed she could not be heard. So she stopped her useless noises.

She heard Ross say restlessly, "What say? Shall we stripe out?"

Ivy said, "What's the hurry?"

They spoke in ordinary conversational voices. Miss Murphy heard *them*. Therefore, *they* had heard everything she had been shouting—every frantic word of hers that still rang in her own ears.

Miss Murphy's head became filled with a red rage.

She sank down, missed the seat, went all the way to the floor and felt, at first, an enormous relief. To be so degraded as to be kneeling on a dirty floor and leaning her clean forehead against a worn wooden seat . . . to feel the first comforting rush of self pity . . . Soon Miss Murphy was weeping.

She would not look at them again. But *they* were looking at her. *They* could see her, crumpled where she was. *They* could even hear her sobbing. A little of her pride came back. She hushed herself and looked at her watch as best she could. It was 9:22. Twenty-two minutes had reduced her to this?

She put her chin on her forearm, stared at the back wall of the booth, and forced her mind to turn over. The gas-station opened, she guessed, not much earlier than eight in the morning. This then was her earliest firm hope of release.

Now she trembled and felt ill. She could endure. She must endure. But it was horrifying and primitive: it called on reserves she had not used in years, if ever. Long shud-

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ders of rage were going up and down her spine. She must not think, for even one moment, of the four of them or she might begin to pound her head on the glass and hurt herself.

Then she heard a motor. Were they leaving? She would not look. Then she heard a scream of brakes. A car had come. Then she heard a voice crying in concern for *her,* "Hey, lady! Gee—I'm sorry! Look, I'm getting you out right away!"

She looked then and saw a man beyond the glass with a heavy tool in his hands. She struggled upright, feeling weary and soiled, and she heard the wonderful crunching of breaking wood. Then suddenly she was free.

It was the owner of the gas station. "Say, listen, that's a nasty thing to happen," he said, supporting her with his strong arm. "How long were you in there? I got here as soon as I could. I had to put some clothes on, and I had to come all the way across town. Guess it took me about twenty minutes . . . Well, I'm sorry, really sorry."

Miss Murphy looked toward the laundry building. No convertible was there. The Four had vanished.

She heard the owner say, "The minute the girl called me I came as fast as I could . . ."

"The minute who called you?"

"Some girl—said her name was Ivy Vole."

"Called you! Twenty minutes ago!"

"That's right. Say, are you okay?" He thought she might faint. He led her to his car. "I want to wedge this door so nobody else gets into trouble. Then I'll take you home," he promised.

"Yes, my sister . . . I have her medicine . . ."

Miss Murphy got weakly into the man's car and sat there and the cold air sharpened the chill of the sweat at her hair line. Then they had learned to do that much. They *had* conformed. They *had* acted to save her. And people would believe that they had saved her. But if they had sat and watched her for twenty minutes *and had not told her so . . .* simply watched her suffering . . . It was too subtle and refined a cruelty. And it was not because they were so cold and so callous that they did not recognize her suffering. Nor that they were too young or too self-centered . . . or too ignorant. On the contrary. They had not only recognized her suffering, they had prolonged it deliberately. They had enjoyed it.

When she reached home, her sister Diane looked up from the novel in which she had become lost. "What kept you, Delphine?" asked Diane, lazily. And then jealously, "I suppose it's nice out."

"Very nice," said Miss Murphy, whose legs were like water.

In the morning, soon after the first bell rang, a message summoned Miss Murphy to Mr. Madden's of-

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fice. When she got there, she found the room full. There was a man who could be nothing on earth but a police officer. And standing, in formation, but like culprits before judgment, were The Four.

Miss Murphy's lumpy little face was very pale this morning. She felt no new shock to see the four of them —the older shock that had rocked her whole system was still operating. Now she seemed to look through them—all the way through them—with cold green eyes.

"Last night," said Mr. Madden, in a voice of restrained anger and excitement, "this office was wrecked —vandalized, as you can see."

Miss Murphy saw the torn papers, the broken drawers, the ink on the walls.

"These four students, as you know, have done this sort of thing before. Last year they were forgiven. This time Police Officer Davis here and I feel that something a bit different is going to have to be done about them. Now, I called you in, Miss Murphy, because *they* say . . ." there was a small but distinct sneer in Mr. Madden's thin cultivated voice, "that *you* can give them an alibi."

"I?" she said.

The eyes of The Four were on her. For once she stood in the range of their eye-beams and was solid and seen by them.

"You know . . ." began Stan.

"Quiet," snapped Mr. Madden. A wave of something like alarm went through the phalanx. Mr. Madden was on the warpath. No one could doubt it.

"These four," he said ostensibly to Miss Murphy but really to the policeman, "have got away with just about enough. We can no longer help them here at school with the measures at our command. And they need help. They need it from experts and some day they will realize how fortunate they were to get it at the right time." Mr. Madden glanced about him. "This handkerchief," he went on, "was found here in my office. And it gives them away. Now, let's forget all this nonsense about an alibi and get on with it."

Miss Murphy looked at the handkerchief, a grimy scrap of cotton with IV in one corner. IV. For Ivy Vole. For Ivy. And the Roman way to write a four. She brooded on the symbolism . . . The Four . . .

"Better let me put this to her," said the policeman Davis, courteously, for Mr. Madden was obviously not wholly objective this morning. "Now, Miss Murphy, it seems that last night, up until nine P.M., there was somebody in this building."

"Adult education class, out 9:02," snapped Mr. Madden. "Mr. Collins locked up after it. No trouble then. But when *I* came here, for some papers I needed at home, *I* walked right into them. They were at work, all right. In the dark. One of them hit me . . ."

Miss Murphy now saw the slight bruise on the principal's face.

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"That," said Madden with satisfaction, "will make it enough of a crime so that we can really . . ."

"Let's—er—get at this alibi business," said Davis, clearing his throat. "Now, Miss Murphy. Mr. Madden came here and caught them in the act, although of course they got away in the dark . . . at about nine twenty. Where were you at that time? Do you remember?"

Miss Murphy did not speak. But she remembered.

"*They* say you were locked in a phone booth," said Davis. "*They* say that they called the man to come and let you out. *They* say they stayed by you . . ."

"Is that what they say?" There was a sick chill in her voice. The four rippled slightly—like a sensitive plant recoiling from a touch.

"We have checked with the owner of the gas station," said Davis in his calm voice, "and he corroborates that much of their story. The girl called him close after nine. Now he let you out at nine twenty-five, or a few moments later, but he says these four *were not there*. Not at nine twenty-five."

Miss Murphy remained silent. The times marched stately in her mind—9:00 . . . 9:25. She recalled reading her watch in the poor light, with her knees on the dirty floor of the telephone booth . . . at exactly 9:22.

"You see how it stands, Miss Murphy?" Davis said. "They could have come here to the school after phoning the gas station owner . . ."

"They did," said Madden positively.

"Somebody . . ." began Ivy.

"Be still," the principal said. "Miss Murphy, I can only warn you very carefully. Don't make a mistake about this."

Miss Murphy stood there with power.

"You saw us," Stan said accusingly.

"Sure she did," said Ross.

The eyes of the girl, Ivy, bored into Miss Murphy's. Well? they said. There was even a little scorn in them. You are trapped, they said. You have to speak the truth and you know it.

Miss Murphy smiled and spoke the truth. "Yes, they were there. All four of them. They stayed by me." She said it without bitterness, as if she spoke in a not unpleasant dream. "So," she continued, "they couldn't have done this damage. Not between nine and nine twenty-five. Is that what you wanted of me?"

"Gee, thanks!" she heard one say. Was it Tentor?

"If she gives them an alibi . . ." Davis said and opened his hands.

"Miss Murphy," said the principal in a tired voice, "if this is mercy on your part, if you mistakenly think that they ought to be let off again . . ."

"No, sir," she said quietly.

"Get back to your classes," Madden snapped at them.

The four, with a sudden scurry of feet, went away.

"If you are trying to be friendly

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and lying for them . . . Oh, I know you have had a certain sneaking fondness . . ." Mr. Madden's mouth looked as if it might froth and Davis had his ears pricked. "Then you are so wrong," said Madden fiercely. "This was our last chance to save them. Don't you realize that? They'll lie low, now, till the end of the year."

"I know it was the last chance," Miss Murphy said softly. "But the truth is the truth. And besides, it doesn't matter. They are trash."

Both men looked at her, a little shocked and startled, and then they let her go.

A little later she sat at her own desk and heard them knock. She called, "Come in." The Four came in and arranged themselves before her. She knew at once what they had come to do. They were conforming. They would throw a sop to good manners, to civilization. They had grown shrewd. So they would, in cold blood and on the surface, pretend to conform.

"Gee, Miss Murphy," Stan said, "we wanted to tell you that we think it was swell of you."

"To tell the truth?" said Miss Murphy lightly.

"Somebody just put my handkerchief there," said Ivy in her small whine. "On purpose. Because we get blamed anyway."

"Trying to frame us," Ross said.

Tentor smiled, but his puffy eyes were sleepless in evil.

"Oh, yes, you have been framed," Miss Murphy said. Her green eyes looked them over indifferently from under her dusty lashes. "You may go now," she said and her mouth curved slightly. She might just as well have said *Go now—go on to hell.*

The icy mystery of her own cruelty —for she saw where they were going and did not care—intrigued them. They blinked at her; then their eyes shifted, puzzled. But they left. Outside they fell into formation again. The girl, Ivy, put her small feet proudly down and assumed that sleepwalker's look, and Stan seemed as fierce as ever, and the greyhounds ranged on the flanks, defying anyone to touch them . . . or to teach them.

Miss Murphy could see them in her mind's eye. She watched for the last time. She thought: What waste! Born, raised, grown so high, and already lost . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CLIFFORD KNIGHT**

TITLE: ***Never Kill a Cop***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Patrolman Jack Mullins

LOCALE: North End

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Old Jack's neighbor said: "A cop is not a judge or a jury—and God knows he's not an executioner." But when one of their own has been killed, the cops may break the rules.*

RON WAS COMING IN TO GIVE HIMself up. He'd been on the lam for a month now, but he couldn't take it any longer. The word was that the Goof had seen him in Chicago and had told Chief Cutter.

Old Jack Mullins had thought about it all that day after the word had gone around headquarters, and for most of the night that followed. He couldn't sleep for thinking about it. Ever since the killing a month ago he had worried. In many a sleepless night he'd thought about Betty, who'd been Ron's mother. She'd been Jack's little sister, the littlest girl in the family. Upstanding, forthright, with bright blue eyes. In growing-up years she had never tried to shift the blame for anything she shouldn't have done. She'd always own up to it and take her medicine.

Somehow old Jack must have let her down. For when she realized at the hospital, years ago now, that she wouldn't make it, she'd asked her big brother to look out for Ron. Where had he failed her?

Ron had been a good kid. Oh, sure, he'd run with his gang, and the White Alley Rats, as they called themselves, were always fighting the kids from the Ravine. Tire irons and baseball bats, rocks and brass knucks. And heads got busted and kids got sent to the hospital. Essentially it was the same as it had been forty

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years ago when he was growing up, only rougher now. At that age you were trying to prove something. You were proving that you no longer were just a faceless kid in a family. Instead, you were a man with two good hind legs to stand on, and you could take it and you could dish it out, and above all you had to be loyal to your pals.

So Ron was coming in. He was going to take his medicine. Stand before the bench and accept what the judge handed out. That was his idea—Ron's—according to the Goof. The Goof was a petty hoodlum with a record, who always had a little stuff to spill on somebody else.

Captain Ed Boyd was standing in the doorway of the chief's office talking to the chief. Their voices died down as Old Jack approached. The patrolman paused and said to the chief, "You wanted to see me, Tom."

"Come in," said the chief. He and Jack Mullins had joined the force the same day, long ago, and they'd been friends ever since.

Captain Boyd followed the two inside and leaned against the frame of the open window through which came the light of late afternoon and sounds of home-going traffic.

Jack stood and the chief sat on the edge of a table, his left foot swinging. It was easy-like and friendly. Old Jack, as they were calling him now, was an institution on the force, and he was near retirement with honor. For years his beat had been in the North End where he'd done an exceptional job of keeping law and order.

"It's nothing much I've got on my mind, Jack—that is—" The chief became apologetic. "I suppose you've heard what the Goof told me."

"I did."

"Sorry to have to bring it up. You think it's true?"

"You know the Goof as well as I do."

"Yes, I know," said the chief quietly. "He's a liar. Have you had any direct word from Ron?"

"No."

The atmosphere was still easy, friendly, although the subject was a sore one to Old Jack.

"Ron lived at your house, didn't he? With you and Effie."

"Since he was eight years old, Tom."

"Gone a month now, and didn't write you a line?"

Captain Boyd spoke. "Why would he?"

Officer Mullins swallowed and was slow to answer. It was the way Boyd said it that griped him.

"He'll tell me some day—all about it. He's a good kid."

"Barney Roberts was a good cop," said Captain Boyd. He went on after a moment. "Myrtle's going to have it pretty tough trying to make a living, now that Barney's gone. She ought to be staying at home with those little kids."

"You think he'll come in, Jack—on his own?" asked the chief.

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"I'll say again, Tom, what I've said before." Old Jack was earnest. "The boy ran because he was scared. And when he gets over being scared he'll come back and tell me all about it."

A thin smile twitched the lips of Captain Boyd, but he didn't say anything.

According to Homicide there was enough on Ron now to hang him. Officer Roberts had been shot with his own gun in the alley back of Wilson's Radio Repair Shop on Missouri Avenue. Ron had been heard to brag he'd get Barney Roberts for pushing the gang around, and after the killing Ron had lammed out of town. He'd been afraid to drive his own car away from the scene—at least, it stood there only a few yards from the body. A couple of marijuana cigarettes had been found under the front seat.

Chief Cutter said, "How long had Ron been smoking marijuana, Jack? Or don't you know?"

The silence was unbroken except for the sounds of traffic in the street below. Then officer Mullins answered, "He never did smoke anything, Tom—marijuana or anything else."

Captain Boyd laughed. "I suppose he told you that, Mullins."

"He did," replied Old Jack earnestly. "I asked him once—"

"And you believed him?"

"He's truthful."

"Then how come the marijuana in the car?"

The color deepened in the officer's heavy face. They'd never asked this question before. An angry retort was on his tongue and he struggled to soften it before he spoke. It would be an accusation that the cigarettes were planted by somebody on the force. Finally he said quietly, "I'll take Ron's word for it. When I see him."

"So you think he'll really come in?" asked the chief.

"Some day, Tom."

"I wish things were different, Jack," said the chief kindly.

Officer Mullins walked out of headquarters. He felt the chill his going left behind him. He said good night to the desk sergeant, knowing the sergeant's eyes were on him as he went, and the eyes of the others standing about in the room. They were sorry for him; they were thinking, "Too bad about Old Jack. A punk for a nephew. A cop killer. And the old man did his best for the boy."

There was something else, too, this last week—something even more subtle. It was latent in the fact that now they didn't talk so freely when he was around. They had a way of clamming up; they were going to keep it from him. They didn't want him to know what they were thinking about Ron. Planning.

That evening Effie said, "Aren't you going to watch the fights on TV tonight, Jack?"

"The fights? Oh—yes. I forgot." He roused in his chair where he'd

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been sitting since dinner pretending to read the evening paper which rested unopened on his lap. "Yes—I guess so."

His wife switched on the television. He hadn't told her about Ron yet—about the word the Goof had brought. Effie had been more of a mother to Ron than any other woman could have been except Ron's own. She had rejected violently from the first the thought that Ron was a cop killer. She'd have to know sometime—if Ron really was coming in—but not now. He had to think it out. All the angles.

He scarcely saw the weaving figures on the screen as they flailed away at each other and fell into clinches. He didn't hear the telephone until suddenly Effie heaved up from her chair and went in her hurried waddling walk to the dining room to answer it.

"It's for you, Jack," she called from the doorway. There was an odd sound in her voice. "Long distance," she breathed tightly as he went past her.

"Long distance?" he echoed. Then his heart thumped in his chest and he felt cold between his shoulder blades.

"Hello," he said, thickly. "Hello—"

"Mr. Jack Mullins?" said the operator's voice. "Hold the line, please." There was a pause, then she said to somebody, "Drop ninety cents, please."

He heard the sounds the coins made, then a breathless voice, a familiar voice scarcely above a whisper: "Uncle Jack? Uncle Jack—"

"Speak up so I can hear you."

"I'm glad to hear your voice. Gee, I'm glad! How are you and Aunt Effie?" The voice was louder, but it held a note of caution.

"Fine, boy, fine," said Old Jack heartily. "How about you?"

"Listen—I haven't called—you know why—Oh, I'm all right—" Ron's thoughts were jumpy and he spoke as if he were afraid someone might overhear him.

"Tell me this, boy—did you talk to Goof Moran in Chicago?"

"That was a week ago. We didn't talk much."

"Did you tell him you were coming in and giving yourself up?"

"No, sir, not that. I didn't say anything to him like that. I wouldn't tell him that. I'd tell you first. That's why I called. What do you think, Uncle Jack?"

"About what?"

"Should I?"

"You mean come in?"

"Yes. That's what I mean."

"I think you ought to."

"Did they find out who did it, Uncle Jack?"

"They say you did. Did you, boy?"

"I can't talk any more, Uncle Jack—I've got to get out of here—there's a fellow outside the booth—" There was panic in the boy's voice, and suddenly the conversation was over and Jack Mullins put down the receiver. He walked back to the living room.

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"Was it Ronnie?" asked Effie tensely.

"Yes, it was Ronnie."

If Lieutenant Sylvester of Homicide had kept his mouth shut next morning, Jack Mullins wouldn't have gone the way he did—with full steam up—to Chief Cutter's office. But the fat detective said to Jack, pulling him into the squad room, "They tell me Ron was in St. Louis last night—"

"Who's they?" demanded Old Jack.

"Well—I heard it when I first came on, that he called—"

For a moment Old Jack's fists were tight balls of bone and muscle, and he had an urge to slug. In all the years he'd been on the force he'd never had anything like this happen to him.

With firm tread he walked down the hall to the chief's office, opened the door, and went in.

Captain Boyd and the chief broke off their conversation, their eyes lifting from the papers on the table to stare at Officer Mullins. After a moment Cutter said, "Well, Jack—"

"Tom, I'm going to tell you something—and if you don't like it you can have my badge—"

"Well, now, Jack, don't go off—"

"Ron called last night from St. Louis. But I don't much more than get in the front door here this morning when I hear it from Sylvester."

"Well, now—"

"Let me finish," the patrolman said angrily. "Of all the lowdown dirty tricks to play on an officer who's sworn to duty! I never thought it would happen to me. There's a tap on my phone or you wouldn't have known anything about that call last night until I told you this morning, which was what I planned to do—"

"Well, Jack, I'm sorry. It's the first I've heard about a tap. You know the department wouldn't do that; we can't legally, so—"

"Listen, Tom. This morning I'm having my phone put on stand-by till Ron comes in. So call off your tap and I'll do without a phone."

"He's actually coming in?" asked Captain Boyd.

Patrolman Mullins stared at the captain, then he said, "If you'll play the tape again, Ed, you'll hear Ron ask me if he should come in and you'll hear me answer yes." He was silent for a moment, then he added, "If the department will keep its nose out of it, I'll bring the boy in."

Officer Mullins turned on his heel and walked out of the chief's office, closing the door behind him with firmness and no little noise.

Old Jack's blood pressure didn't get back to normal until later on in the morning as he made his rounds in the North End. It was the city's Skid Row but they never had called it that; it had been known just as the North End since long before the term Skid Row had become current. It was the haunt of the down-and-outers, the petty crooks, the prosti-

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tutes, the gandy dancers resting between jobs, and the carnies in off season. Saloons and flophouses and barber colleges and missions and the Salvation Army headquarters were all here in the North End. And Officer Mullins kept order on his beat amid the confusion, the noise, the smells, and the frustrations in a frazzled world all its own.

Now that he could think without getting angry, Old Jack thought about Ron. He poked into alleys, he looked into saloons and the lobbies of cheap hotels, as was his daily routine, but his thoughts were on Ron—and behind Ron, on the memory of Betty, the littlest sister. The abrupt ending of the telephone call the night before, and the way it ended—as if Ron feared that someone outside the telephone booth was waiting to grab him off—was an indication of how jittery the boy must be.

But how was he coming in? Would he show up at home one day after dark, knocking on the back door only to have somebody from Homicide jump out from behind the lilac bushes and grab him? If they'd tap a police officer's telephone they'd do the other, too. They'd stake out. Why?

That was the thing that Old Jack was afraid to think about. It wasn't that they didn't trust him—Officer Mullins—to bring the boy in to the booking desk. They wanted to get their hands on him before he got that far. He hoped it wasn't so, but he was afraid that it might be. There'd been the Ernie Gillis case years before. It was the last cop killing in the city until this one of Barney Roberts. There'd been a saying that had gone the rounds for years: "Never kill a cop in this town."

"Hi, Jack," said a voice behind Officer Mullins as he stood at the corner of Third and Missouri.

Mullins turned around and saw the tall, somewhat bloated figure of Goof Moran.

"Hello, Goof," he said, without friendliness. The hoodlum always made him think of something slimy, although he dressed better than most and looked overfed and fairly clean. Nothing had come of it yet, but for some time Mullins had suspected the Goof of pushing dope.

"How's tricks, Jack?" said the Goof, leering at him.

"Tricks are something for you to keep away from." The patrolman spoke with warning in his voice, then he added, "Listen, Goof—Ron didn't tell you in Chicago that he was coming in and giving up."

"No?"

"The boy wouldn't tell you anything. So you lied to the chief."

"Does a kid like Ron have to say in so many words he's comin' in? It stuck out all over his face. He didn't have to tell me nothin'. Say! How did you know that?" The Goof appeared surprised.

"Playing stoolie ain't going to help you at headquarters, Goof, if you lie to them like that. The first time you

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cross 'em up, into the can you'll go."

"Now, listen, Jack, I know what I'm talkin' about—"

"Why didn't you grab Ron right there in Chicago and yell 'Police!'?"

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?"

The Goof wasn't smart. Not the way he thought he was. His last words stuck in Old Jack's mind as he walked away down Missouri Avenue, leaving the hoodlum standing at the corner.

It was just one more thing to fit in with the others that had made Old Jack uneasy. The clamming up on him, the tap on his telephone—and now the intimation on the part of the Goof that there was a reason why he hadn't turned Ron over to the Chicago police.

At home that evening Officer Mullins was thoughtful. Effie, however, didn't try to pry into his thoughts. He did tell her about the telephone tap and she was properly indignant.

"It's just as if somebody down there don't trust you, Jack."

"That's the way I figure it," he said aloud, but privately he had a different angle. They were scheming something, planning something.

"It's Ed Boyd, ain't it?"

"I don't know. It's not Tom Cutter."

That night the neighbor next door came over. He said, "Is your phone out of order, Jack? Long distance wants you."

"I'll come," said Old Jack, and he walked next door with the neighbor who in his early years had also been on the police force.

Jack Mullins heard the coins drop. Only thirty-five cents this time. Ron was closer. Suddenly the panic which last night had been Ron's was now his. He wanted to shout to his nephew to run. Run! And keep going. Never come back, never, never to his home town.

"Uncle Jack," said the youthful voice. "I'm on my way in."

"Yes," said Jack Mullins. "I see. Yes."

"I just wanted to call. I think I ditched that fellow last night—They said your phone was out of order. I had to ask the Fettermans to get you over."

"Yes."

"Listen, Uncle Jack—"

"Yes—" All the time Old Jack was thinking: Run, Ron! Run!

"I'll be there tomorrow. Shall I come out to the house—after dark?"

"No! Not that," said Old Jack, his voice rising suddenly with alarm. For there'd be somebody staked out, he was sure.

"But where?"

"Listen, boy, you know my beat. Somewhere on the beat tomorrow. Make it in the afternoon. Anywhere along my beat. Third or Missouri, say, and don't be conspicuous. Just stick around. I'll find you."

"Okay, Uncle Jack."

The neighbor followed him onto the front porch when the telephone conversation was over.

"Ron, was it?" he asked kindly.

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"Yes."

"I don't get it, Jack. Living next door, we've known Ron ever since he was a little kid. Maybe he was in mischief that night, but killin' a cop? No."

"Thanks, Sam. I'm glad you believe in him."

"He's a nice boy. You know—" He started, then stopped abruptly, and Old Jack waited. The night was warm, there was a breeze from the south; there was peace and quiet in the neighborhood. Sam Fetterman cleared his throat softly, "Can I be of any help, Jack?"

"Thanks, Sam. I guess I can handle it."

"Have you thought about getting in touch with Judge Thompson?"

"You mean—?"

"That car, now, a couple of doors down the street and across—it was there last night too."

"Oh, sure—they'd stake out. That's why I don't want Ron coming to the house."

"I can guess what's in your mind, Jack."

"Yeah. I've been scared even to think about it."

"It goes back to the Ernie Gillis case, doesn't it?"

"Yeah."

"Ernie had it coming to him, of course. But not that way. A cop is not a judge or a jury—and God knows he's not an executioner. His job is to bring his prisoner in—not to pass judgment. But cops sometimes get to thinking like the kids in a gang—the White Alley Rats, or the kids from the Ravine. In this town, I mean. Maybe it's different everywhere else. I hope so."

"Yeah. That's why Ernie Gillis was killed—because he killed a cop."

Jack Mullins didn't sleep that night. He thought about Judge Thompson, the police commissioner. He was a fair man, and an officer could go to him if he had a problem. And Jack Mullins's problem, now that Ron was coming in, was to get the boy safely into jail.

Of course, there was his old friend Chief Cutter, but in the last few years Tom seemed to be losing his grip on the department. Little things kept pointing to the fact. So now he was afraid to take his problem to him. If there was a scheme afoot to prevent Ron from having a fair trial, Jack didn't know who might be in on it. His fellow officers were all his friends more or less, but somebody had killed a cop and they were sure that Ron had done it.

In his long career Old Jack had brought in many a prisoner; it was routine, familiar—but with Ron it was different. Not merely that he was Betty's son. It was hard enough just to bring him in, but this other thing—the utmost caution was required. He tried to plan how best to accomplish the simple act of bringing Ron in alive. Which was better—boldness or subterfuge? Judge Thompson probably was the best bet of all—nobody at headquarters would figure that angle.

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Patrolman Mullins was turning these thoughts over in his mind when he actually saw Ron. The sight of the boy pulled him up sharp, with a swelling in his throat he couldn't swallow. Nice-looking lad—clean, tall, with blue eyes like his mother's. A boy you could be proud of.

He was trying to be inconspicuous, standing near the alley between Third and Fourth just off Missouri Avenue.

"Hello, Ron," said Jack.

The boy turned. His eyes lighted up and he held out his hand almost shyly, as if doubtful of his uncle's intentions. They shook hands silently and Old Jack said, "Come on. This way."

They went down the alley and through the back door of a saloon. He had planned it this way—to get the boy off the street and out of sight. The squad cars seldom came along this beat in the North End. There wasn't much chance that anybody from the department would see Ron. That's why Jack had chosen his own beat as a meeting place.

They sat down at a table in the back room. A waiter looked in and Jack ordered two beers.

"Anybody see you, Ron, coming into the North End?"

"Nobody I recognized."

They drank the beer, Ron silently, slowly, his uncle with brows knitted, turning the situation over in mind, and only now and then lifting his glass. Suddenly he raised his glass and threw its contents on Ron. The beer ran down Ron's shirt front.

The light all but died in the boy's eyes, for it seemed to him that his uncle, on whom he had counted so much, had repudiated him. Old Jack reached across the table and with heavy hand rumpled the boy's hair. Still without speaking, he leaned over to the bare floor, rubbed his hand in the dust, then wiped it on Ron's forehead and cheeks, and over his shirt front.

"Listen, boy," he said at last, "I hate to do this. You've got to play drunk. Stagger a little. We're going next door to the hotel. The clerk over there don't see too good."

They went next door to the New Madrid Hotel which had been new fifty years before. He had Ron by the arm as they approached the desk. He jerked at him, handling him with rough authority, and rumbled, "Come on, come on," and Ron staggered.

The albino clerk looked with blinking eyes at the pair, then recognized the patrolman, "Hello, Jack," he said, "What's this?"

"Listen, Gordon," said Officer Mullins, "this boy needs a room for a while—till he sobers up. Comes of a nice family. I don't want to run him in."

The clerk reached for a key and passed it across the desk.

"I'll register for him when I come down," said Old Jack, taking the key. They went up the moldy stairway, found the room, went in, and

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Jack closed the door behind them. He let loose of Ron.

"Sit down," he said.

The boy sat. "Aren't you going to take me to jail, Uncle Jack?"

"I expect to. But later. You're supposed to have killed a cop."

"But I didn't, Uncle Jack, I didn't—"

Old Jack Mullins stood for a moment in disbelief, although it was what he wanted to hear. "Are you telling the truth?" he asked in a voice that broke on the last word.

"Yes. I swear I didn't do it."

Ron had got up from the chair. Truth was in his eyes, in his face, in his desperate eagerness to be believed, and Old Jack took the boy in his arms and hugged him.

"I knew it," he said, "I knew it, but why did you run?"

"I was scared."

"But you lammed off and left your car—marijuana under the seat—"

"Marijuana? I never had any. I've never smoked it."

"Sit down!" He pushed the boy into the chair and sat down himself on the edge of the bed.

"You said you'd get Barney for pushing the gang around."

"That I'd get him? But I never said it, Uncle Jack."

"What do you know about the killing?"

"I heard the gun."

"Where were you?"

"Down the alley. Barney Roberts had been chasing us and we got away from him and were hiding."

"Who was hiding?"

"Slim Peters and me. Only we'd got separated."

"What were you doing in the alley in the first place?"

"Nothing. Just driving around. Slim said, 'Let's go through the alley.' Barney was down there and he made us get out of the car. He said he was going to arrest us and we got scared and broke away—"

"And then you heard the gun—later? How long?"

"Maybe five minutes. I didn't know where Slim went—I didn't see him again. Everything was quiet and I went back to get my car and then I stumbled over Barney's body. It scared me—"

"Where was the gun?"

"I don't know. I didn't see it. I started running and I thought I'd better leave town just in case—"

"Did you see anybody else in the alley?"

"No. Barney said, 'Are you kids trying to buy dope?' Like maybe somebody was hanging around in the alley to sell it."

"Was Barney looking for a dope peddler?"

"He didn't say."

"But he was already in the alley? He didn't follow you in?"

"No, he didn't follow us. He jumped out of a doorway and yelled for us to stop. And he had his gun out, pointing at us."

Officer Mullins went downstairs and wrote a fictitious name in the register. He put down a couple of

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dollar bills and said to the clerk, "He'll sleep it off. Don't disturb him. I'll be back later."

He went out into the hot sunshine and walked down to the call box and checked in. Then he went to the pay telephone at the corner drug store. He looked up the number of Judge Thompson's telephone and dialed. A woman's voice answered. He asked to speak to the judge.

"I'm sorry, sir, but Judge Thompson left yesterday on his vacation."

"When's he coming back?"

"He'll be away three weeks, sir."

"Okay. Thank you."

He went out onto the hot sidewalk. He'd have to plan something else now, and do it quick. Perhaps he should go to the D.A.'s office and see the district attorney. But the guy didn't like him. The last time he'd been a witness in a manslaughter case they had clashed and the D.A. had got mad at him.

There was yelling down the block and people began running. He ran. It was a fight—a vicious, man-killing fight between a couple of winos. Jack waded in just as the unlucky one of the pair went over backward and struck his head on the curb. Jack called the wagon and the ambulance.

It was half an hour before things were back to normal on the beat. As the ambulance pulled away and the crowd broke up, Goof Moran, who had been an onlooker, said, "Old Rough and Ready on the job, I'll say."

Patrolman Mullins looked sourly at the hoodlum and didn't speak.

"I hear Ron's back," said the Goof.

"In the pig's eye. Break it up and keep moving."

"No kidding. He's got a snootful now and is sleeping it off."

Officer Mullins moved fast. He grabbed the hoodlum and backed him hard against the store front.

"Who says so?" he demanded.

"The birds, Jack, the birds. They'll tell you lots of things if you listen."

A squad car stopped abruptly in the street and a fellow officer leaped out and came to Old Jack's side.

"Need help, Jack?" It was Johnny Liebrecht.

"With a punk like this?" He let go of the Goof. "What are you doing down here, Johnny?"

"Just going by. Thought maybe you needed help with the Goof."

"I can handle him, Johnny. Any day. Except for his mouth. I can't do anything about his yap. And neither can you."

"Okay. Just thought I'd ask." Johnny ran back, climbed into the squad car, and was driven away by his companion.

"They don't ride double any more in the prowl cars," said the Goof. "Johnny must be going somewhere."

"Is that so," grunted Old Jack. "Why don't you tell me where he's going?"

"You wouldn't want to know."

A coldness was now spreading between Old Jack's shoulder blades.

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He turned and walked away quickly. For the first time in years now he was really scared. Scared about Ron, about the horrible thing that was building up. Johnny Liebrecht wouldn't normally be in the North End. He was here for a reason. Johnny was one of those who had clammed up whenever Jack approached the boys. He'd been a sidekick of Barney Roberts'.

At the next corner the squad car went by. Only the driver was in the car. He'd dropped Johnny somewhere.

Policing his beat had left Jack little time to think of Ron in the hotel room, and it only now occurred to him that Ron had said something about a boy named Slim Peters. So far as Mullins knew, the Peters angle had not been uncovered by Homicide. Had Slim seen anything of the killer that night? Or—had Slim done it himself? He remembered Slim, a teen-ager whom Ron had brought around to the house a couple of times. But he'd better be getting Ron out of the hotel. And fast.

It was nearly time for him to knock off for the day. He went up to the corner and around the block as was his custom, and then the simplest solution of all came to him with something of a shock.

At the far corner was a taxi stand. Jack walked up and said to a driver, "Al, in ten minutes be out in front of the New Madrid Hotel and wait for me—"

"But if I get a call—"

"I'm telling you. Be waiting for me."

Officer Mullins headed for the hotel room where he'd left Ron.

As he entered the lobby he had a feeling that both puzzled and alarmed him. Something was going on; something already was under way. It was in the atmosphere.

The albino clerk merely smiled as Old Jack passed the desk. Neither spoke. Jack pointed to the ceiling and continued up the stairs.

There was a sense of anxious waiting, as if for an imminent explosion. He felt it on the stairway and in the empty hall on the second floor. As if to banish it by forthright action, Old Jack rapped sharply on Ron's door.

After a moment the key clicked, the door opened, and Ron let him in. The boy had washed his face and combed his hair, and had tried to wash the beer out of his shirt. The shirt hung on the back of a chair near the window.

"Have you seen Slim since that night in the alley, Ron?"

"No, sir."

"You don't know, then, whether he saw the killing or not."

"No, sir."

"Or if he did it himself?"

Ron was silent for a moment, then he said, "Not on purpose. It would have been an accident—like if they scuffled and the gun went off."

"You don't know if Slim is in town?"

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"No, sir."

There was a rap on the closed door that startled them into silence. A sly, almost timid rap. No policeman would knock that way.

Old Jack jerked the door open and the tall, bloated figure of Goof Moran stood in the doorway. The Goof hadn't expected to see the patrolman, and he was startled.

"What do you want?" demanded Officer Mullins.

"Well—Jack. I live here now at the New Madrid. Since yesterday—"

"Speak up! What are you here for?"

"It's just that—well, maybe I could do Ron here a favor." He jerked his head toward the end of the hall. "Some of the boys from head—"

Officer Mullins suddenly reached for the hoodlum and jerked him into the room. It had all become clear in a flash. They'd set it up here in the New Madrid—the boys from headquarters had set it up—and they'd sent the Goof to lure Ron into the trap.

"Here's a favor from me," said Old Jack, losing his temper. With a sledge-hammer blow he knocked the Goof across the room where he crashed onto the bed.

"Come on, boy," Jack said to Ron, "let's go."

The taxi ought to be waiting downstairs. He'd get out with Ron before the boys from headquarters knew what was going on. But the Goof struggling up from the bed had grabbed Ron by the leg.

"Let go," roared Old Jack. He started toward the pair; he was taking Ron to the safety of the jail and no hoodlum was going to stop him. When the police trap was sprung, it wouldn't be on Ron.

A voice from the doorway stopped him cold. He turned to face fat Sylvester from Homicide. Behind him was Johnny Liebrecht, and still others were in the hall drawn by the racket. Guns were out, gleaming in the dim light. His way was blocked —but they weren't going to get Ron.

"Look out, Jack!" Sylvester dived at him and shoved Officer Mullins violently just as the Goof's gun exploded. The bullet ripped through Old Mullins's jacket and seared his side like a branding iron.

It was Johnny Liebrecht who fired from the hallway at the figure rolling on the bed. The Goof went limp in the silence that suddenly followed the nearly simultaneous shots. The smell of the guns damped out the moldy odors of the room. Sylvester got to his feet.

"The Goof found out too late that the finger was on him," he said. "Are you hurt, Jack?"

"I guess not," he answered, feeling his side. After a moment he said, "There's Ron. But I'm taking him in —and nobody's going to stop me," he ended grimly.

"We don't want him," said Sylvester.

Mullins was slow to figure it out. "How do you mean—don't want him?" he asked.

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"A kid named Slim Peters saw the Roberts killing. He told his story just this morning. And it checks. The Goof killed Barney. The Goof, though—"

Officer Mullins walked over to the window, leaned against it, and for a moment looked out over the tarred roofs. He couldn't swallow the lump in his throat. He was thinking about Betty, his littlest sister. He hadn't let her down after all; and Ron—Ron was all right. She could be proud of him. He brushed at his eyes with the heel of his hand. Then he turned to Sylvester and spoke harshly because he had to cover up the softness that had hit him all of a sudden.

"Did you send the Goof here just now to get Ron?"

"No, we didn't, Jack. It was the Goof's idea. He'd been trying to finger Ron from the start. But he overdid it. We were just waiting down the hall for the Goof to come in so we could pick him up." Sylvester looked with disdain at the body on the bed. "He tried to kill you, Jack. He must have figured at the last minute that we knew he'd killed Barney Roberts and that you'd outsmarted him and had set it up for him like this."

"Maybe so, Sylvester." Old Jack reached for his nephew's arm, brought the boy forward and said, "Boys, I want you all to shake hands with Ron. He's a good boy, and he'll give the department no more trouble. He's my sister's son," he said proudly, "my littlest sister's son."

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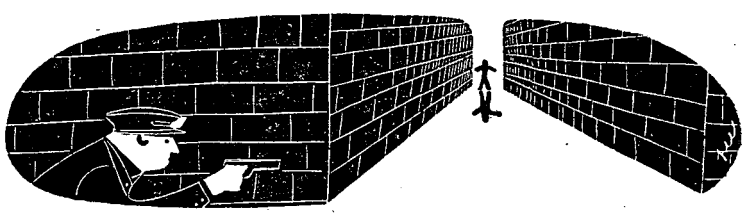

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THE BOTTLED WIFE

by MICHAEL FESSIER

THE SMALL COURTROOM WAS jammed with spectators when the case of Alvin Prent, M.D., versus George Bashford, came to trial, Judge Homer Leggit presiding. Everybody in the community knew Dr. Prent's side of the lawsuit, which involved several thousands of dollars, but, because George Bashford, owner and operator of the town's leading garage and usually a loquacious individual, had been unaccountably uncommunicative concerning his views in the matter, speculation was rife as to what possible defense he could put up for himself.

Judge Leggit, a peppery man with bristling white hair, banged the gavel for order, noted that Dr. Prent was represented by Attorney J. Youngs, and then observed that George was sitting alone at the counsel table.

"Mr. Bashford," he said sternly, "whoever your attorney is, you'd better whistle him up. I'm not going to stand for delays."

George, an amiable-appearing,

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sandy-haired man of middle age and stature, rose and faced the judge. "Your Honor," he said. "I haven't got, don't need, and don't want a lawyer."

"Why not?" asked the judge.

"Because I got justice on my side."

"That's a matter for the court to decide," declared the judge. "If you insist on conducting your own defense, Mr. Bashford, I must warn you that you may be seriously jeopardizing your case."

"And if I hired a lawyer," said George, "I'd be seriously jeopardizing my bank roll. Your Honor, in this land of ours justice is supposed to be as free as the air we breathe; it's our inherent right; it's guaranteed by the Constitution. So what happens?"

"That's a rhetorical question if I ever heard one," said the judge, "and I'm not sure I should encourage it. But I'll bite. What happens?"

"What happens," said George, "is that a guy by the name of John Doe goes and gets himself murdered. So the cops come into the case, and, through a process of error and ignorance, they arrest Joe Blow and charge him with the murder. Joe Blow wasn't there and didn't do it, but just the same he's in the bucket and he can see the shadow of the noose on the wall. He's got money, so he hires a lawyer. And what does the lawyer do?"

"I object," announced Attorney Youngs, leaping to his feet. "This case does not involve murder."

"And it hasn't started yet, either," the judge told him. "So sit down and be quiet."

Attorney Youngs, young, sleek-haired, and with a small mustache, sat down beside Dr. Prent, also young, sleek-haired, and with a small mustache.

"Go ahead," the judge told George. "I want to see just how your mind works. What does the lawyer do?"

"The lawyer," said George, "audits Joe's bank account, inventories his liquid assets, and assays the gold in his teeth, and the sum total turns out to be precisely what the lawyer's going to charge Joe for defending him. After that they hold a trial and the lawyer proves that Joe Blow didn't kill anybody and he's acquitted. So, because the cops, whose wages he helps to pay, made a mistake, Joe is now busted; he's spent a couple of months in jail; he's probably lost his job or his business; and he's got a hollow cough caused by a damp cell."

"Just what does he think he's trying to prove?" inquired Attorney Youngs petulantly.

"What I mean," George told him, "is that if your client should happen to benefit from a colossal miscarriage of justice and win this case, I'm not going to give him the satisfaction of knowing he cost me extra money for a lawyer."

"He," Attorney Youngs told the judge, "is trying to prejudice the jury even before the case begins."

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"We haven't a jury for him to prejudice," said the judge. "Suppose we go about selecting one."

In examining prospective jurors, Attorney Youngs asked numerous questions before determining their suitability, but George contented himself with inquiring only as to their marital status. He challenged all women and bachelors, and it was obvious that his strategy was to stack the jury. But he exhausted his challenges, and when the jury was finally selected it included a lone, lean, uncongenial female by the name of Mrs. Sylvia Pembroke. The others were all married men.

"Your Honor and members of the jury," said Attorney Youngs in opening the case for the plaintiff, "I propose to prove that the defendant, George Bashford, did take into his place of business, the Acme Garage, a nearly new thirty-five-hundred-dollar Imperial Eight automobile, the property of my client, Dr. Prent, for the purpose of performing a minor repair, and that he thereafter did feloniously, maliciously, and out of spite dismantle, damage, and otherwise make inoperative the said automobile. We propose also to prove that Mr. Bashford subsequently presented my client, Dr. Prent, with a bill for the preposterous sum of five thousand dollars and that, when Dr. Prent declined to pay, Mr. Bashford refused to relinquish possession of the automobile in question."

Attorney Youngs then went on to explain that he would demand exemplary and punitive damages from George and that he would also insist upon declaratory relief from George's incredible service charges.

"Your Honor and members of the jury," said George in rebuttal, "I propose to prove that this case has aspects and facets that do not appear on the surface and that my conduct of the whole matter followed a pattern established and employed by the plaintiff himself. I furthermore deny that the car is inoperative. She runs pretty well, considering the shape she's in. And as for my repair bill, I intend to prove that it's justified according to the precedent set by that eminent and learned local body snatcher, Dr. Alvin Prent."

"I object to this man's abusive language," said Attorney Youngs.

"So do I," said the judge. "Hereafter, Mr. Bashford, I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

"I stand corrected," said George, and turned to the jury. "I'm not going to do any more talking until after my worthy opponent has established his side of the case, which you already know anyway, considering that our eminent vivisectionist's been galloping all over the countryside shooting off his face about what a robber I am and—"

"I object," said Attorney Youngs.

"I should think you would," said the judge, and then he turned to George. "Mr. Bashford," he said, "I'm not going to try to give you a legal education during the brief peri-

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od of this trial, but you can take a hint, can't you? The way you're behaving is not considered correct court etiquette. Do you follow me?"

"Sure," said George cheerfully. He turned and waved to Attorney Youngs. "It's your inning, Buster," he said. "Get up to bat."

Attorney Youngs placed his client on the witness stand. Dr. Prent repeated and embellished the charges previously outlined by his counsel. At the conclusion of the testimony, George waived the right to cross-examine. Attorney Youngs faced the judge.

"I would like to introduce as evidence," he said, "what remains of my client's automobile. I ask the court for permission to escort the jurors to the Acme Garage for the purpose of seeing for themselves the atrocities perpetrated by the defendant."

"So ordered," said the judge.

Stating that he knew the automobile well and had no further curiosity concerning it, George refused to accompany the others to the garage. He waited in the courtroom until they returned and the jurors filed back into the box shaking their heads in bewilderment at what they had witnessed. Attorney Youngs rested his case, and George had himself sworn in as a witness.

"As you all know," he said chattily to the jury, "Dr. Prent is my wife's cousin. But what you don't know is that I lent Alvin the money to get through medical school."

"I object to that as being irrelevant, immaterial, and having no bearing on this case," said Attorney Youngs.

"It's a little early to determine that," said the judge. "Go on, Mr. Bashford."

"The total," said George, "was five thousand dollars—and, to date, Alvin hasn't paid me back one red cent."

"I object," said Attorney Youngs, "on the grounds previously stated."

"And I heard you the first time," said the judge. "Go on, Mr. Bashford. If you're trying to say that you cooked up that five-thousand-dollar repair bill as a means of collecting your debt, I assure you that you won't get very far with it."

"That isn't it at all," said George. "What I'm trying to do is establish the groundwork for my defense." He turned toward the jury. "Shortly after Alvin started in practice here, my wife, Dora, acquired the galloping miseries."

"And what," asked the judge, "are the galloping miseries?"

"It's a pain," said George, "that changes locations faster and more often than a floating crap game. One day it'd be in her head, then it'd roost in her stomach, and then it'd settle in the base of her spine. So she went to Alvin for a consultation. The first thing Alvin did was go in for some of the fanciest free-style needlework you ever heard of."

"Meaning injections, I suppose?" said the judge.

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"Yes, sir," said George. "If those needles were still in the places Alvin stuck them, Dora'd look like a porcupine. Alvin squirted enough liquid into her to float a barge, and she gurgled and splashed when she walked. The wholesale drug people must have thought we had an epidemic here in Pott's Corners. Sulfa —gallons of it—was coming in by fast freight, airplane, dogsled, carrier pigeons, and—"

"Your Honor," said Attorney Youngs in an agonized voice, "I must insist that——"

"I know," said the judge patiently. "Mr. Bashford has a gift for hyperbole that leaves me singularly unamused, but, still in all, he *may* be heading toward something pertinent. Proceed, Mr. Bashford."

"Thank you, Judge," said George. "Well, Dora had so many injections that she built up scar tissue all over her body and her skin got so tough it dented Alvin's needles, and still she had that pain. Then Alvin had all Dora's teeth yanked."

"Why?" asked the judge.

"That's information I was never able to get out of Alvin," said George. "But I'd like to point out that Dora isn't the only woman in Pott's Corners going around with a loose plate that clicks like a castanet when she talks on account of maybe Alvin is a disappointed dentist at heart."

"Your Honor!" screamed Attorney Youngs.

"I know, I know," said the judge soothingly. "Objection sustained." He turned to George. "Mr. Bashford," he said, "because of your status as a layman in this court, I have been extremely lenient with you, but don't pursue your advantage too far. I must warn you to quit rambling and get down to the issues involved in this case."

"I'm getting there as fast as I can," said George. "Pulling Dora's teeth didn't get rid of the pain, so Alvin abandoned his needles and forceps and took to the knife. In quick succession he cut out Dora's tonsils, her adenoids, three wens, and a mole. Then he let her lie fallow for a while, but as soon's she recovered her strength, he got out his cleavers again and—"

"I object," cried Attorney Youngs hysterically. "This man is not only impugning the integrity of my client, but of the whole medical profession as well."

"The medical profession as a whole is not involved in this case," retorted the judge, "and it is quite obvious that the one Mr. Bashford is gunning for is your client, who in turn has impugned Mr. Bashford's integrity as a mechanic. All this may or may not have some bearing on the issues involved, and, if it doesn't, I shall instruct the jury to ignore it. In the meanwhile, will you please subside, Mr. Youngs? Go on, Mr. Bashford. What happened next?"

"Alvin," said George, "damn' near eviscerated Dora. Not all at

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once. Just a little bit at a time. Alvin cut out Dora's appendix and her gall bladder, trimmed her liver and pruned her tripes, and then amputated some other things that I'm not going to mention on account of I don't know the technical names for 'em—and besides I've already established my case."

"Not as far as this court's concerned you haven't," said the judge. "You haven't come within throwing distance of the basic issues. I saw what you did to Dr. Prent's car. Suppose you give us your version of that affair?"

"I think," said George, "that I forgot to mention that the bill Alvin gave me for what he did to Dora was exactly five thousand dollars, which, by a strange coincidence, was precisely what he owed me. Considering Dora still had the galloping miseries, I think that was excessive, don't you?"

"Dr. Prent's bill for medical services has, as far as I can see," said the judge, "no bearing on this case. Your bill for mechanical services has. Will you kindly get around to explaining that?"

"Gladly," said George. "When Alvin brought his Imperial Eight into my garage, he didn't know exactly what was wrong with it. He said it ran slick as grease on the level but he didn't think it had the power it should have on hills and, besides, he figured he wasn't getting enough mileage out of his gasoline. Now this is where the matter of professional ethics, protocol, and procedure comes in. I didn't want to tell Alvin that I didn't think there was anything wrong with his car—that might have insulted him. Besides, I figured it'd make him feel better if I fussed around with it a bit, and then I had to charge him plenty for my services or else he'd think I hadn't taken his case seriously."

"Don't forget to mention that the bill was five thousand dollars," interjected Attorney Youngs. "That was more than my client's car cost him."

"Five thousand dollars," said George, "was more'n my wife cost me, too." Then he turned to the judge. "Your Honor," he said, "has this guy got a right to bat during my inning?"

"Objection sustained," said the judge. "Mr. Youngs, you know better'n to do that. Proceed, Mr. Bashford."

"Well," said George, "it was quite a problem. Of course I had to work under the assumption that my customer could have been right about loss of power on the hills and the increase in gasoline consumption. So I figured it wouldn't do any harm to examine the car's nervous —I mean, electrical system. I amputated the fog lights, cigarette lighter, radio, and dome light. . . ."

"Just why did you do that?" inquired the judge.

"They could have been a drain on the juice the battery was delivering to the spark plugs," explained

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George. "And besides, as anyone knows, all those things aren't really essential to the running of a car."

"And then what did you do?" asked the judge.

"Well," said George, "I based my procedure on the precedent set by Alvin, here. I figured that when you don't know what's wrong with a car, the only thing to do is to keep on cutting things out of it. I excised the horn, the hood, the rearview mirror, the windshield, the left rear fender, and the spare tire. That didn't seem to do much good, so I pulled out three spark plugs which still left a lot more spark plugs in the motor than my wife has teeth in her head, and then I amputated the air cleaner and the oil filter."

"And I suppose," snapped Attorney Youngs, "that you're going to insist that the car still runs as well as ever."

"Well," said George, "she still runs as well as my wife does without her gall bladder, not to mention the other accessories she's missing."

"I object," howled Attorney Youngs.

"It isn't your turn to object," the judge told him. "I'm the one that objects. I object to this whole outlandish proceeding." He leaned over and glared at George. "Mr. Bashford," he said, "anyone with half an eye can see the point you're trying to make, and—not that it's going to do you any good—are you satisfied? Are you through?"

"Not quite," said George. "Your Honor, I'd now like to introduce Exhibit A in my own defense." He turned to the bailiff and whispered a few words. The bailiff hurried away and George turned back to the judge. "Be patient, Your Honor," he said. "She'll be here in a minute."

There was a commotion at the rear as the bailiff escorted a fat, red-faced, angry woman toward the bench.

"Oh, there you are," she called, as she caught sight of George. "What's the meaning of having me held in that little room all this time, and what's the meaning of having me hauled in here like a sack of potatoes?"

"Mr. Bashford," inquired the judge, "just who is this woman?"

"That's Dora, my wife," said George.

"And what's she doing here?" asked the judge.

"She," said George, "is Exhibit A. And what's more, Your Honor, I demand the same right as you gave my opponent. I demand that the evidence be examined by the jury."

"You mean," gasped the judge, "your wife?"

"Sure," said George. "Down to every last scar, incision, and adhesion."

The male jurors looked appalled, and some of them seemed ready to bolt from the courtroom. The judge was horrified.

"Of course," said George, "the evidence as it stands isn't complete. Dora isn't all here, Your Honor.

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The rest of her, her more intimate and functional parts, are scattered all over Alvin's laboratory in bottles. I demand that these bottles be labeled Exhibit B and that they be produced in court for the scrutiny of the jury."

"Cousin Alvin," shrieked Dora, "are you going to stand there and let him do this to me?"

"He can't get away with it," said Dr. Prent, who was white and shaken. "My attorney says you're not admissible as evidence."

"You don't know what George can do, once he sets his mind on it," said the terrified Dora. "Cousin Alvin, I demand you withdraw your case—or else!"

"Don't mind me," said the judge, wearily. "This is just supposed to be a court of law and I'm supposed to be presiding, but what does it matter and who cares? Go on, Mrs. Bashford, you interest me. Or else what?"

"Alvin," said Dora, "needs a loan of ten thousand dollars to buy a practice he wants in Midvale, and he thinks he's going to get it from Uncle Wilford, but I'm standing right here and now to tell him that, unless he calls off this case, I'll put a flea in Uncle Wilford's ear and he won't get a single red cent."

Dr. Prent held a brief, whispered consultation with his counsel, and finally Attorney Youngs approached the bench. "Your Honor," he said, "my client agrees to withdraw all charges."

"Never," said the judge, breathing deeply, "have I heard better news in my life. Although I must advise you, Mr. Youngs, that the instructions I intended to give the jury would have practically precluded any chance of Mr. Bashford winning this case."

"That's what you think," said a tall, gaunt juror, while several of his male colleagues nodded approval. "I'd have voted for George. Doc Prent's got part of my wife in a bottle, too, and I'd have—"

"I wouldn't have," snapped Mrs. Sylvia Pembroke, the sole female member of the jury. "That man Bashford is an unfeeling brute. I'll have you know, Judge, that what he jestingly calls the galloping miseries is the most painful cross a lady has to bear. I have a pain that starts just—"

She began to reach for the spot, and the judge banged the gavel.

"Mrs. Pembroke," he said, "your standing in this court is now unofficial, your information is superfluous, and your symptoms are of no interest to me." He turned to Attorney Youngs. "Do you still agree to withdraw your case?" he inquired.

"We do," said Attorney Youngs, "providing that Mr. Bashford restores the missing parts, puts my client's automobile in good running order, and then submits a modified and reasonable bill for his services."

"Do you agree to that, Mr. Bashford?" asked the judge.

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"I do," said George promptly, "providing—"

"Providing what?"

"Providing," said George equably, "Alvin submits a modified and reasonable bill to me. And also providing that he restores my wife's teeth, tonsils, gall bladder, and other deleted spare parts, and puts *her* in good running order."

"Mr. Bashford," said the judge quietly, and then his voice rose to a scream. *"Mr. Bashford!"*

"Okay, Judge," said George, grinning. "I was just kidding. I agree to the terms. I never expected to get my money back from that dead beat, anyway."

"Oh, you were just kidding, were you?" The judge leaned over the bench and spoke in a low, strangled whisper. "Mr. Bashford, you have given me the most miserable day in my experience as a jurist. Someday, Mr. Bashford, I would appreciate the extreme pleasure of trying you for murder. Right now, I'm considering whether or not I can stretch contempt of court into a felony and give you a life stretch in the state pen, and what's more—" Suddenly he paused and grinned fiendishly. "But, pshaw!" he cackled. "I don't have to worry about your getting your just deserts. From the looks of that wife of yours and considering what you tried to do to her, I imagine that you're going to spend the next few weeks in hot water of your own brewing."

George grinned and pointed to where Dora was now sitting with Mrs. Pembroke in the otherwise unoccupied jury box, their hands pointing and fluttering over their bodies as if they were performing some form of hootchie-cootchie dance.

"She's got another interest in life now," said George. "They're discussing symptoms."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ANDREW GARVE**

TITLE: ***The Downshire Terror***

TYPE: Multiple Murder

DETECTIVES: Chief Constable and his staff

LOCALE: Downshire, England

TIME: September and October 1956

COMMENTS: *An unknown maniac had his own drastic method of punishing the violators of traffic laws. It became a reign of terror in the county. A "different" story—read it and ponder!*

IT WAS IN SEPTEMBER 1956, SHORTLY before my retirement as Chief Constable of Downshire, that the man who was soon to become notorious as "The Downshire Terror" first showed his hand. A chap named John Iles, a driving instructor employed by the Excelsior School of motoring in Donchester, had been to the pictures after work and had left his car parked in a quiet run-in beside the School's premises, as he usually did. When he went to collect it just before ten o'clock he found that someone had torn off a headlamp, forced a door, and slashed the upholstery. On the driver's seat there was a cutting from the *Donchester Herald* reporting a court case in which Iles had recently been involved—one of his pupils had panicked during a lesson and mounted the pavement before the dual control could be used, slightly injuring a woman. Pinned to the cutting was a sheet of paper on which the wrecker had penciled:

15 KILLED AND 112 INJURED IN ROAD ACCIDENTS IN DOWNSHIRE LAST MONTH!

NO WONDER, WITH MEN LIKE YOU IN CHARGE OF NEW DRIVERS!

WHY DON'T YOU PAY ATTENTION WHEN YOU'RE ON THE JOB?

IF IT HAPPENS AGAIN, YOU'LL BE IN FOR IT!

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It was an ugly little incident, and we did all we could to discover who was responsible. But there wasn't much to go on. The job must have been done after dark, for no one had seen anyone near the car. The wrecker had evidently worn gloves, for there were no useful fingerprints. The paper on which the message had been written was common typing paper, unwatermarked, and could have been bought at any stationer's. The message itself afforded no clue, except that it pointed to a reasonably literate person.

We interviewed a number of people who might conceivably have had a private grudge against Iles, including the woman who had been knocked down by the School car, the pupil who had mounted the pavement, and several others who had failed to pass their driving test after tuition—but we got nowhere. Iles himself was very upset by the incident, and the School had to give him some sick leave.

We were still working on the case when, a few days later, the first murder was committed. A young man named Jocelyn Wade, a member of a well-to-do county family, had been up to London for the day in his fast sports car, and on his way back had dropped into a quiet country pub, The Dog and Feathers, about five miles beyond Donchester. He had left the pub just before ten—and at ten thirty his body had been found lying beside his car in the car park. His skull had been crushed by two blows from a heavy instrument, possibly a spanner, delivered by someone who must have crept up behind him. On the car seat, the murderer had left a sheet of paper, with the penciled words:

THIS MAN DROVE THROUGH DONCHESTER HIGH STREET AT 42 M.P.H. THIS EVENING.

WATCH OUT, YOU DOWNSHIRE SPEED FIENDS!

IT MAY BE YOUR TURN NEXT!

Once again there were no fingerprints, no material clues. Once again the assault had taken place in darkness, and the assailant had got clear away.

We knew now that there was a maniac in our midst—a man with his own crazy notion of a road safety campaign. Next morning the activities of "The Downshire Terror" were the chief topic of conversation all over the country. The popular newspapers were full of him. Hordes of reporters arrived in Donchester, virtually taking over the County Hotel. They wanted to know not merely what we were doing about the Wade murder, but how we proposed to prevent any more deaths. On that point, it wasn't very easy to be reassuring. The peculiar grimness of all these multiple murder cases—where sudden attacks are made out of doors after dark and no personal motive links the mur-

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derer and victim—is that the police usually have to wait for further attacks before they can close their net. What I did say was that one of the best safeguards might well be for everyone to drive with exceptional care in Downshire until The Terror was apprehended.

It seemed certain that we should need outside help in our task and I had already asked for a conference at the Home Office to concert plans. But before it could be held, there was a second murder. This time the victim was a woman, a Mrs. Fray. She had been visiting friends in Donchester and had set off home in the car soon after nine o'clock. At ten she had been found lying beside the car on a grass verge, not far from her house, with her head battered in. The usual piece of paper on the driving seat said:

THIS WOMAN FAILED TO STOP AT THE HALT SIGN IN DONCHESTER THIS AFTERNOON.

The front near-side tire of her car was flat, but there was no puncture—the valve cap had been removed and the valve loosened. It seemed probable that The Terror had marked her down during the day, followed her to her friend's house, loosened the valve in the street after dark, and assaulted her on the road home when the flat tire had forced her to stop.

The new murder gave even greater urgency to the conference at the Home Office. It was attended by several experienced officers from the Yard and by the Chief Constables of the counties adjoining Downshire. They were all short-handed, for like Downshire their territories lay between London and the sea and at this time of year the crowded state of the roads and the frequent accidents were a heavy strain on police manpower. However, they agreed that reinforcements for Downshire were essential.

The best hope seemed to lie in greatly strengthened night patrols, so that even if the next murder couldn't be prevented we should at least have early information on which to act. The Terror, after his butchering excursions, must have a lot of blood on him and his first need would be to rush off to some quiet retreat where he could remove all traces. Our aim must be to intercept him. Our counter-measures included dividing the county up into sections with a system of road checks that could be brought instantly into operation. We also fixed up a decoy plan, by which plainclothesmen in private cars would drive around the built-up areas of the county at more than the legal limit in the hope that The Terror would eventually follow one of them.

For a week after the conference nothing happened. Then The Terror suddenly struck again—and this time it was in broad daylight! A lorry driver named Albert Stokes

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had stopped his vehicle in a lay-by some ten miles outside the county boundary, and after lunch he had stretched out in his cab for a nap. He was found there in the middle of the afternoon, dead from multiple head injuries. The message on the seat said:

THIS MAN PASSED ME IN DONCHESTER AT 45 M.P.H. HIS LEGAL LIMIT IS 25 M.P.H.

It was now clear that The Terror, though still concentrating on what happened in Downshire, was prepared to pursue his victim outside the county if necessary. That meant that every driver who passed through was taking a risk, unless he drove impeccably. The odds against any one person being picked on were, of course, considerable, but by now the name Downshire had become synonymous in the public mind with sudden, violent death, and most people preferred not to take chances. There was no great falling off in the amount of traffic, but there was a marked improvement in road behavior and an impressive observance of all speed limits. At this rate, The Terror would soon be short of victims.

Another week went by—a week of unremitting inquiry into the earlier incidents and of ceaseless vigilance by the road patrols. By now a huge force of police had been drafted into the area. As one quiet day followed another, I began to think The Terror had abandoned his campaign. Any sane person would certainly have been deterred by our preparations.

But late one night he killed again.

His victim, a man named Lever, was found with the usual head injuries only a short time after the assault. His car was in a ditch in an unfrequented lane and it looked as though he had driven it there himself. The message on the seat said:

THIS MAN, WAS DRUNK WHILE DRIVING!

Within seconds of the discovery, our machinery went smoothly into action, and we must have missed the escaping murderer only by the narrowest of margins.

We brought in still more police and increased the patrols. For nearly a fortnight Downshire waited in a state of mounting tension. Then, suddenly—and in a way I hadn't foreseen—the end came.

I was driving home one night, very tired after a late conference at the station. I had just turned into the High Street when a small black car passed me. For a moment I could hardly believe my eyes, for it was doing over 40 m.p.h. in a restricted area—and drivers in Downshire simply didn't do that sort of thing any longer!

I decided that it must be one of my decoys. I put on speed until I could read the number. I knew all

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the decoy numbers, and it wasn't one of them. I stepped hard on the accelerator, and so did the chap in front. Two other police cars swung in from side turnings and joined in the chase.

We raced through the town at sixty miles an hour, and I passed the black car at sixty-five. Its brakes squealed as I turned in front of it, there was a crash as it hit me, and then it swerved off the road through a garden fence. As it stopped, the driver jumped out and began to run. I took after him and so did half a dozen other officers, and we caught him in less than fifty yards.

It was the driving instructor, John Iles!

He was wearing a long, plastic raincoat, and there was blood all over it. He'd just done his last job!

We found out afterward that he'd been spending his "sick leave" in a caravan, parked beside a stream in a lonely spot in the next county. After each murder he'd gone straight back there to clean up. He told us he felt that his mission in Downshire was now pretty well accomplished and that he'd intended to return to work on the following day. So if he hadn't been the one man in Downshire who wasn't scared of The Terror, he might have got away with it.

He was hopelessly mad, of course. If his deeds hadn't made that clear, his attitude in court would have proved it. According to him, he was a public benefactor and should have had a medal. He admitted he'd killed five people, but he pointed out that in the month in which he'd been operating, road casualties in Downshire had fallen from 15 dead and 112 injured to 2 dead and 33 injured, solely on account of him—a net saving of 8 lives and much useless suffering.

The judge said grimly that this was the arithmetic of bedlam, and had him bundled off to Broadmoor without any more fuss.

There was exuberant relief throughout Downshire when it was realized that sanity had returned to the county and that the danger was over. The next month's road casualty figures were an all-time record at 20 killed and 153 injured.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL KELLY**

TITLE: ***Collector's Item***

TYPE: Bedtime Story

LOCALE: Worden's Kill—in the suburbs

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Henry collected Early American silver. Alice collected vaseline glass. Collecting, it has been said, can become a mania . . .*

HENRY MORRISON HAD "MONEY": not so much as to require his commuting into the city every day to take care of it, the way the really wealthy have to do, nor so little as to require his commuting into the city every day to make more of it, the way his neighbors had to do; he had just enough money to permit his staying at home and devoting all his time to his hobby. Henry collected Early American silver.

He was 42, unmarried, and he lived with his mother near Worden's Kill in a small white-shingled house crammed with the trophies of his collecting.

Every week-day morning Henry came down to the railroad station, crossed the platform filled with commuters waiting for the 7:40, and passed into the Post Office across the street. He greeted all he saw, whether he knew them or not, with an ebullient cheerfulness that sometimes rasped upon those who had not yet completely adjusted themselves to enduring another day of city noise and dirt; but if, occasionally, the response to his greeting was less than cordial, Henry never seemed to notice it. He just laughed a little more loudly and puffed a little harder on one of the foul-smelling cigars which he seemed never to be without. He was immune to the jibes which some of the commuters not daring to insult him directly sometimes directed toward his taste in tobacco; and when anyone mentioned the apparent high content of excelsior or dried grass, Henry would just smile and throw back his

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shoulders and look happily at the glowing tip of the cigar as if this tobacco, like his silver, was something to which only he could give proper appreciation.

Several of the commuters insisted that Henry chose that particular time of day to visit the Post Office only because it gave him a chance to remind those who were going into town that he did not have to go into town with them; and since the Post Office did not open for business until 8 o'clock, that may have been true.

Others insisted, just as vehemently, that Henry was starved for friendship; but since he always courteously repulsed any gesture of friendship that anyone offered him, that could *not* have been true.

The answer may have been the one which had first been offered as a joke: Henry wanted friends, but his mother wouldn't let him have them.

Mrs. Morrison owned the house in which Henry lived and the money that allowed him to stay at home every day, and while Henry had begun and built the silver collection, more or less by decree, Mrs. Morrison owned that, too. Whether Henry appeared as an item in her inventory of things she owned, only she, and perhaps Henry, knew; but Bess Natwick, who had once been invited to see the collection, reported to the bridge club that when they came upon Henry, placidly polishing silver in a corner of the room, Mrs. Morrison had pointed out all his good points and discussed him in exactly the same way she had talked about the silver; and Alice Hartwell, who had been waiting to marry Henry ever since they'd gone to high school together, in a rare moment of bitterness told one of her friends that the only reason the marriage had never taken place was that Henry's mother didn't think he was old enough to get married yet.

Alice was 41, a year younger than Henry, and completely careless of who knew that the only man she had ever cared about in all her life was Henry Morrison. She was undismayed by the fact that he had ceased to talk about marriage as soon as he left high school, or perhaps she took comfort in knowing that he had never shown any interest in any other woman; she accepted her spinsterhood as unprotestingly as she accepted the gathering years, joked about the gradual thickening of her waistline and the gray streaks in her hair, and worked at *her* collection of vaseline glass.

Alice said frankly that she had begun the collection so that when Henry decided to ask his mother's permission to marry, he might be able to add to the list of her qualifications the fact that, as a fellow collector, she could be expected to bring to the silver a true collector's appreciation; but she had long ago learned to love the things she had for their own sake, and now knew as much about vaseline glass as Henry did about Early American silver.

Late one fall, Mrs. Morrison suf-

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fered a stroke which completely paralyzed the right side of her body and condemned her to the mobile imprisonment of a wheel chair. The full burden of caring for the collection fell upon Henry, and it was not a burden which he enjoyed. Henry liked collecting silver, but he preferred that, once collected, it be kept in condition by someone else.

In May, despite the warnings of certain crass friends who felt compelled to point out that his decision to wed might have been prompted by a less than romantic impulse, Alice Hartwell became Mrs. Henry Morrison. She scoffed at well-meant warnings; after twenty-five years, a school-girl dream had become almost incredible reality, and that was enough.

Mrs. Morrison did not attend the wedding. The stroke had left the flesh of the right side of her face loose and lifeless, sagging from her scalp in festoons of fat that drooped the lid of her eye, twisted her mouth, and salivated her speech, and she shrank from exposing her disfigurement in public.

And so, immediately after the ceremony, they came up to the little white house. It delighted Alice, especially as she found places where her collection might be put on display, but this, she found, was a suggestion not to Henry's liking.

Pressed glass, he said, was trash, and pressed colored glass a gaudy abomination. Even to suggest placing it in the same room with his treasures was to insult the silversmiths who had fashioned them. Besides, Mrs. Morrison reminded her, stuff so tastelessly disfigured with dust-catching scrolls and patterns as vaseline glass needed constant washing and polishing if it were to be kept in condition for display; and if Alice intended to waste her time caring for that stuff, when did she expect to find time to take care of the silver?

And then, carefully, as if they were explaining to a three-year-old why she must not scribble upon the walls with crayon, they instructed Alice in the proper care of Early American silver.

She must never use any of the commercial cleaners, the so-called "easy" polishing agents. She must never use any of the harsh chemical solutions and powders guaranteed to dissolve tarnish so that it might be spilled down the drain with the dirty dishwater. She must never use any of the rouge pastes, since these sometimes contained incompletely ground particles which might scratch the carefully cherished sheen of the metal. Under no circumstances should she attempt to use one of the chemically impregnated polishing cloths or a buffing wheel or any of the electric polishing tools.

There was only one thing proper for use on Henry's silver, and that was a secret which she must never allow anyone to discover. Dealers and other collectors had long envied the sheen of Henry's collection, but

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the few who had been gauche enough to ask about his polish had received only a knowing smirk and a puff of smoke from Henry's cigar for an answer.

If they were too stupid to take the hint, that was no fault of Henry's; as far as he was concerned he had as much as showed them what he used. Henry's secret polish was the ash of a strong cigar applied with a piece of well-washed linen moistened with distilled water. It did take a lot of time and a lot of rubbing, but what, after all, were these to anyone who had time in abundance and no lack of muscle?

And so Alice polished the silver with the ashes of Henry's cigars, with old linen and distilled water, and passed them over to the old woman for inspection; and she learned to keep silent even when she heard the heart-sickening sound of the newly polished spoon sliding back into the dishpan, the old woman's wordless indication that she had detected another imperfection. But sometimes, when Henry happened to be away in pursuit of a new item and the old lady snored through her afternoon nap, Alice would take one of the pieces of glass out of her trunk and set it in the window to catch the glint of the sunlight, and sit beside it, polishing the silver and humming quietly to herself.

For a short time after the wedding many of Alice's old friends came to visit her, to be shown around the house and to share in the giggling confidences that delight new brides; but after the third or fourth of these visits, Henry spoke to Alice.

Having so many visitors upset Mother; Mother was not a well woman; and this, after all, was Mother's house and they, in a manner of speaking, were guests in that house and so, if she didn't mind . . .

Since he was her husband and she had sworn in church to obey, she tried to forget about the things whose sparkle was hidden in the darkness of her trunk; but there were times when, listening to visitors ecstacise over the spoons, it became very difficult for her not to point out that she, too, had a collection, one which they would find just as interesting as Henry's.

Once, when Henry had some visitors in, she had become so upset that she had actually called one of the ladies to one side and asked her to come into the other room to see some of *her* things. The woman, of course, hadn't known any more about vaseline glass than Henry did, and things grew very awkward while Alice dragged one treasure after another out of her trunk and displayed them to someone who was too polite to say that Alice was boring her and too unskilled an actress to keep from showing it.

Alice had expected the Morrisons to be very angry, but they surprised her completely.

Henry even apologized for not having realized how deeply she loved her own things, and suggested that

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they turn the little storeroom off the back hall into a sort of gallery for the glass. The next day he set up the shelves for her and then all three of them worked together to arrange the collection so that every piece showed to its best advantage; and for a while Alice knew the happiness that she had expected her marriage to bring her.

The next time that they had visitors, after the chirruping over the spoons had finally finished, Henry asked the guests if they wouldn't like to see what his wife collected. Mrs. Morrison wheeled herself down the hall, with Henry herding the visitors after her, and showed them into the new gallery; but before Alice could begin to tell the guests about the collection, Henry and his mother began to lead them around the room, explaining that this plate had been bought for only three hundred soap coupons, and this creamer picked up for only a quarter at a white elephant sale, and this piece. . . . Alice never forgot how mean they had looked, moving around the room, telling those awful lies, laughing and smiling, and Henry blowing that hateful cigar smoke all over everything. She had packed the glass back into the trunk without saying a word about it to either of them, but she hadn't forgotten it.

And then one day, when Henry was on one of his trips, Alice went running for help. Mrs. Morrison had tried to go out on the front porch while Alice was busy in the kitchen, and the wheel chair had rolled right over the edge of the porch, pitching the old woman down onto the brick sidewalk. She died, still unconscious, two hours before Henry reached home.

Alice was too ill from shock to attend the funeral; but when Henry came home to a house which was at last all his own, he found that Alice had recovered enough to move all of the furniture out of the old lady's room and into the attic and to strip the closets of the clothes which she had left behind. The next day Alice moved the trunk with the glass in it into the center of the newly barren room and locked the door; but Henry was too busy with the settling of the estate to notice it.

A month later, Henry left the house to go down to the Post Office and to get some more cigars at the store; halfway across Depot Square he crumpled up on the grass. By the time the doctor arrived, he was dead. The doctor wasn't at all surprised; Henry had had a bad heart for years, and the recent death of his mother had apparently overtaxed him.

Alice, as usual, was polishing the silver when the minister arrived at the house to tell her somberly that she was a widow.

She took the news very calmly, just untied her apron, hung it on the hook inside the closet door, and went out to the hall to get her hat, smoothing her dress straight as she went. When the minister brought her back about an hour later, everything

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had been settled. Henry was to be laid out at the funeral parlor and then taken over to the city and cremated.

There was a good deal of discussion about that, since many people thought that it would be more appropriate to bury Henry from the house where he could be laid out surrounded by all the things that he so loved; but Alice said, sensibly enough, that the house was too small to accommodate all the people who might be expected to want to pay their last respects to Henry; besides, it was dangerous to throw the house open to strangers with all that valuable silver hanging on the walls where anyone could get at it.

Anyway, she hadn't had a chance to finish all the polishing and Henry had said, often enough, that if folks couldn't see his silver at its best he didn't want them to see it at all. So Alice had her way, and after the funeral the undertaker's man drove her back to the house, carrying what was left of Henry in a cardboard carton very much like those in which she used to bring ice cream home from the store; and he dropped her at the door.

Several of her friends had offered to come home with her, but Alice wouldn't hear of it. She said she'd have to live alone there in the house for a long time, and the sooner she got used to it the better.

She came slowly into the living room and walked right over to the fireplace and set the carton down in the middle of the mantel. She stood there looking at it while she lifted the heavy veil, trimmed with twin bands of black silk ribbon, off her hat, and then turned and went into the bedroom.

The hat box was still resting on the spread; she folded the veil carefully and put it into the bottom of the box, put the hat on top of it, and carried the box over to the closet. The top shelf was too high for her to reach; she dragged a chair over and, a little red-faced from the exertion, climbed up on it and shoved the box way back on the shelf. She heard the dull thud of its striking against the wall, and climbed down and brought the chair back where it belonged.

Almost without thinking about it, as if the choice had been made so long ago that the moment of choosing was now forgotten, she took one of the really big glass plates out of the trunk, carried it out to the kitchen, and set it down on the drainboard. While the water was running into the dishpan, she went to the closet, took down the apron from its hook, and tied it around her waist.

She washed the plate very carefully, letting the steaming water run sparkling down its sides, and dried it on a huck towel, wiping carefully into every crevice of the design. She set it up on its edge on the window sill to fill every corner of the design with sunshine, and then went back into the living room to continue the

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polishing which Henry's death had interrupted.

The house seemed strange, not alone in the stillness that kept reminding her of her aloneness, but in another, more subtle way. She realized suddenly what it was. The smell of the cigars had disappeared.

Quite unconsciously, she began to hum. She lifted the felt-covered tray from the chest and began to take down the spoons from the rack, placing them carefully so that they could not touch one another. She shook her head and clucked to herself as she laid them down. Only three days delayed, but already the consequences of the late polishing showed. Probably no one but Henry, or herself, now that she had had the benefit of Henry's careful training, could tell the difference; but there it was, a dulling of the highlights of the metal in a general, almost imperceptible grayness as filmy as breath upon a cold windowpane, or as if the sheen of the silver were overlaid with cigar smoke.

She carried the tray out to the kitchen and lowered the spoons, one at a time, into the tepid water. While they soaked, she went to the closet and took down the bottle of distilled water, the creamy length of old, well-laundered linen, and the painted metal tobacco tin into which Henry had poured all the carefully saved ashes from his cigars. She poured a little of the gray powder into an old saucer, moistened the cloth, and dipped it into the saucer. The thin reek of stale tobacco gushed up from the dish, twisting at her nostrils. She stood staring down thoughtfully at the foul-smelling mud.

Suddenly she dropped the cloth down over the dish, lifted the dishpan out of the way up on the drainboard, then opened the top of the tobacco tin and held it under the faucet. The ashes boiled out, sticking blackly to the back of her hand as she turned her head to one side to avoid the reeking fumes. When the water came out of the can clear and sparkling, she tossed the tin into the garbage can and rinsed off the saucer. Humming softly, she dried her hands on her apron and padded into the living room and over to the fireplace.

The cover stuck a little, but she got it off. She tilted the carton to one side and let the gray dust inside slant toward her. Her finger reached out and pressed down upon the ashes. Yes, indeed. If anything, these were softer than cigar ashes.

She walked back to the kitchen, carrying the pale cylinder carefully in both hands, and set it down on the shelf over the sink. She lifted the glass plate up off the window sill, carried it into the living room, and set it down on the mantel on the spot from which she had removed the carton.

She stood there, her head held to one side, looking at it for a long time. Then, humming happily, Alice went back to the kitchen and resumed polishing the silver.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JEANNE SAKOL**

TITLE: ***Five Letter Word***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Well, it finally made it—Scrabble as the theme of a crime story. But not just the game itself—rather, Scrabble with "Freudian connotations." Sleek and sophisticated.*

IT HAD REACHED THE POINT WHERE she couldn't bear to play Scrabble with him any more. Marvin was an incurable jokester of the "Nudge" variety. He was fond of saying, "This game was invented in Philadelphia. Philadelphia Scrabble—get it?"

And if this weren't enough to set her teeth on edge in a forced smile, he would make sure by greeting such words as B-I-T-C-H and L-O-V-E-R and E-M-B-R-A-C-E with gleeful pomposity.

"Freudian interpretation to that one," he would chortle, waggling his finger in her face. "Proves you have a Freudian compulsion to reveal your innermost thoughts and desires. You know, I've been thinking maybe I ought to put in a bid for the Psychiatry Concession from the Scrabble people. Make a fortune. Sell a set to every analyst in the country. Maybe read a paper at their annual convention. Bet if they played Scrabble on those couches they could tell more about a person in ten minutes than in ten months of mumbo jumbo."

Eleanor noticed a decided tendency on Marvin's part to jockey her into the five-letter words which gave him such righteous pleasure. He would put L-O-V-E right next to a triple-score square so that she would be compelled to add S or R to gain the multiple advantage. It hardly seemed to matter whether he won or lost so long as one such moment of triumph highlighted every session.

Canasta, she recalled, had been

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bad enough, night after night after night. The Canasta cards and shuffler had gone the way of the Gin packs, the Mahjong set, the Monopoly board. So now it was Scrabble—but what next, oh, Lord, what next?

This particular evening was warm and sticky, even for May and even for the 18th floor with a southeast exposure. Marvin had eaten his dinner—"accompanying himself on the monologue," as Eleanor called the ritual recital of the day's attrition, punctuating his report with sniffs, slurps, swallowed burps, and periodic requests for the Worcestershire Sauce.

Woman is a congenital actress and strategist. Eight years of marriage had seasoned Eleanor's performance until it was one of stylized perfection, a nightly tour de force of exquisite restraint and amebic resilience. In a way, it was relaxing. She could focus her eyes on him, eat and digest her own dinner, ring for Anna after each course, pass the Worcestershire on cue, and still be miles, continents, centuries away. Dinner was almost pleasant that way.

"We put the terrace furniture outside today, darling," she announced after dinner, opening the double doors to let some of the cool East River breeze into the room. "The weather report said it would be 79 tonight with 90% humidity. Anna hooked up the light. I thought we'd play Scrabble outside. It's cool and there are no cards to blow away like in Canasta."

"Never did like Canasta," Marvin asserted, lighting his first postprandial cigar. "Just a lot of points to add up, that's all. No real skill or ingenuity involved, or—" he grinned through the fetid smoke—"Freudian connotations. That's the fascination of Scrabble for me—always educational, always stimulating, always revealing." He puffed smugly.

"Turn the light on out there, Eleanor. Plenty stuffy, all right. Be nice to play outside. If it's hot later, maybe we'll sleep out. Be romantic. Hate to wake up in the morning covered with soot, though. Still—we'll see . . . You lay out the tiles. I'll get the Scotch."

"Coke for me, as usual," she reminded him. She never drank when they played because drink made her one of three things: sleepy—and therefore dull-witted; affectionate—and therefore vulnerable; sullen—and therefore sarcastic. Better to drink in the afternoon, nap it off before dinner, and arrive on the battlefield clear-headed, dispassionate, and sealed in an emotional vacuum.

Marvin relied on Scotch both as a mental stimulant and a positive reflection of his acquired gracious living. He was tall, broad, and graying slightly at the temples of an otherwise well-covered head. He wore his brown flannel uniform, pale blue shirt, and black knit tie with no apparent flair. His personal taste ran to double-breasted glen plaids and phosphorescent naked-girl ties. Occasionally, he would

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wear the latter as a joke at the golf club or at a sales convention smoker.

Women in general, and his barber in particular, commented on the approaching grayness and how distinguished it made him look. It was when the first few gray streaks began to appear that he took to assuming dignified poses with a highball in hand. He would lean against the fireplace or stand over the television set or gaze through the window, glass poised halfway to his lips. A few months before Christmas his secretary had come into his office while he was having a drink before the arrival of an important client. "Why, you're a regular Man of Distinction," she had said, admiringly.

Marvin liked that. So instead of the usual Christmas cards he had posed for a picture of himself in the "Man of Distinction" style and had it reproduced with the message: "This man's distinction is having you as a friend and being able to wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous New Year!"

Since then, he couldn't sit still in a room full of people, or for that matter during their Scrabble games. He was constantly up and about, glass in hand, looking for a suitable perch, ledge, or vantage point from which to command recognition for his distinctive manliness.

Maybe that was what made Scrabble worse than Canasta, Eleanor mused. He walked around between plays, clutching that perpetual glass of his. A private idea she never voiced was that his wanderings frequently took him behind her chair where he could not help but see the letters on her rack.

Stepping out onto the terrace, she was suddenly drenched in the brilliance of the near-full moon. Before turning on the light she hesitated, breathless, in the shimmering luster. Her figure was revealed a clean and sharp opaque against the silver-cobalt sky. She was wearing a black, sleeveless blouse with an enormous circular skirt and ballet slippers. Her hair was short and blonde and slightly tousled. From the back she might have been 19 or 29. She was 39.

She pressed the electric switch, set up the Scrabble board on the turntable base, and began to lay out the tiles, one by one, face down. Anna appeared at the doorway wearing the hideous maroon rayon print she always wore on her night off.

"I'm leaving now, Madam," she announced.

"Have a pleasant evening, Anna."

Marvin echoed her words as he walked purposefully from the living room, carrying the tray with ice, soda water, Coca Cola, the Scotch decanter, another cigar, and a bowl of Indian nuts for Eleanor. She had taken to Indian nuts as a spiteful luxury, mildly hoping the incessant crack-cracking of the tiny shells would create some reciprocal tension in Marvin. She was wrong. But she developed a curious taste for Indian

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nuts and began to enjoy the rhythmic crunch of the shells and pinpoint tidbits of nutmeat extracted with a flick of the tongue.

Seated face to face, each picked a tile. No matter what letter she turned up, Eleanor always let her husband go first. She would wait to see what letter he had, then throw hers down saying it was higher and allow him the initial pleasure of a double score for the first word. He never caught on nor wondered why the law of averages seemed under permanent repeal at her board.

The game progressed.

```
C-O-B-R-A
      U
      R
  U-N-D-E-R
          E
          A
          L-O-V-E
```

and it was Eleanor's turn again. Marvin was prowling as usual, glass in hand. He was drinking more tonight than was customary, though it hadn't affected his game up to now. She looked at the board and at her own rack.

Up to his old tricks, she saw, annoyance knotting her stomach. The letters she had were C-E-O-F-U-R-Y. She could place F-U-R-Y adjacent to L-O-V-E and make LOVER for a juicy double-word score. If that's what he wanted, okay.

He smiled with satisfaction. "LOVER, Eleanor? Must be a Freudian connotation there, don't you think? Instead of a four-letter word, you use a five-letter word. That shows a high level of civilization, I think."

She ignored his remarks and carefully chose four new tiles.

"By the way," he said, a phrase he used only before a carefully prepared statement. "It's a coincidence you should make the word LOVER when that's what I wanted to discuss with you tonight."

She looked up slowly.

"I've known about your sordid little romance for nearly three months, Eleanor," he recited, clearly. "I know about the apartment in Stuyvesant Town and your healthful weekends with the girls at the Milk Farm. I know who you buy those cute, girlish, expensive dresses for and I know where most of your household money goes.

"But what I want *you* to know is that I'm cutting off your allowance. You can charge food and household expenses and I will pay Anna myself. I see no reason to buy you dresses and permanents and pedicures and massages for another man's pleasure.

"I was going to divorce you at once on the grounds of adultery but it may hurt my business right now. So I will keep the evidence cosily tucked away for a year or two, until it's convenient for me to start proceedings.

"Then will your L-O-V-E-R want you—a middle-aged woman with no M-O-N-E-Y?"

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The light shone directly on the table and he could see neither her eyes nor her expression. She made no answer. He could think of nothing to do but continue playing.

The night silence was broken only by the soft clicking of tiles being made into words and new tiles selected. At last, there were no new tiles left. The final round was at hand.

Marvin had four letters left and was trying desperately to use them all at once. He finally got rid of A, H, E—taking advantage of an open C on the board to make A-C-H-E—and was left with a J. He then stood up, drink in hand, and shuffled about, a bit unsteadily now.

Eleanor studied the board and her four remaining letters as if in a trance. She glanced at her husband. He was standing at the rail, saluting the sky with his drink. She scooped up all her remaining letters—which were D-E-A-T—and fitted them neatly to the H in Marvin's A-C-H-E.

Then she stood up quietly—ballet slippers have soft soles—walked over to her husband and pushed him over the 18th floor railing.

D-E-A-T-H, she mused, was a Freudian five-letter word, too.

"Q"

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

Next Month	a new ELLERY QUEEN story
August issue	a new HUGH PENTECOST story
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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MIGNON G. EBERHART**

TITLE: ***The Hound of the Wellingtons***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: James Wickwire

LOCALE: A farm in Pennsylvania

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The elderly banker's most baffling murder case: he knew one of three people was a killer; he had a photograph of the killer; yet he did not know which of the three suspects was guilty!*

ONE OF THE THREE PEOPLE SEATED with me around the dinner table of the luxurious farmhouse was not only a forger but a murderer. This I knew. And I had the picture of the criminal in my pocket at that moment. The bizarre thing was that I was quite unable to tell even then which of the three was guilty.

It was a letter which set the events of that evening in their strange and indeed frightening course. My name is James Wickwire; I am a senior vice-president of the bank within whose walls I have spent most of my life. The letter, urgent and airmail, was from my lifetime friend and client, Horace Wellington, posted from Rome where he was serving on a diplomatic mission.

"Dear Jim:

"You may have seen in the papers that my nephew, Lassiter Wellington, was found dead last night in his room at the farm. He had been shot, and the gun was one from my own gun cabinet in the library. They say his fingerprints were on it. Fakery, of course. But the police have called this suicide. I know it is murder.

"Let me give you all the facts. Lassiter acted as my secretary, and yesterday I received a long cable from

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him, saying he had discovered a forged check on my account. The check, torn out of my farm check book, was drawn to Lassiter for two thousand dollars and was indorsed by a forgery of his name. My name was similarly forged on the face. It was cashed at your bank where Lassiter isn't known.

"Lassiter's cable informed me that his wallet containing club membership cards and that sort of thing had been missing for a day or two, and presumably this was used for identification at the bank. He suspected who had taken it, and this gave him the identity of the culprit, whose name he said he wanted to withhold from me till he had finished an investigation. He was shot that night, only a few hours after he sent the cable.

"There were just three people in the house at the time of the murder who could have had access to the check book, since the farm and house help live outside the main house. These three are John Crandel, my farm manager, Lisa Benly, his assistant, and Chloe Henderson, a young widow who is my guest, and any one of them could have had access to the check book.

"Jim, will you go to the farm and clear this up for me? I'll cable Crandel to expect you, saying that I have asked you to carry out an appraisal of the farm. I'd be enormously grateful to you."

I replied by cable — and rather too confidently: IDENTIFICATION SIMPLE AS HAVE PHOTOGRAPH OF FORGER. SYMPATHY. WICKWIRE.

I then went to Wellington's Pennsylvania farm.

Horace Wellington having paved my way, no one questioned my arrival — no one, that is, except an enormous, liver-colored dog, who appeared as I walked up the lane from the village taxi. He looked rather like the Hound of the Baskervilles and uttered a deep growl which stopped me in my tracks. However, I like dogs and can say honestly that they like me; so I put out my hand, palm downward in the etiquette right-thinking dogs expect. He sniffed at my hand, examining my shoes and my bag, apparently decided in my favor and wagged his tail. I scratched his ears, the tail wagged faster, there was some sound and the dog loped swiftly away as the house door opened.

A thin, nondescript sort of man came to meet me. "Mr. Wickwire? We expected you. I'm John Crandel. You're just in time for dinner."

It was then that my reliance upon the photograph suffered its first shock. And when he led me into the house and introduced me to Mrs. Henderson and to Lisa Benly, my heart sank. I realized at once that my confidence had been decidedly premature. The face in the photograph had to be the face of one of the three — and I couldn't tell which one.

Someone gave me a cocktail and we went in to a dinner where I munched roast pheasant, listened to the talk

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around the table (which did not so much as mention Lassiter Wellington, dead only three days) and fended off a red setter who snatched at a biscuit in my hand. The talk was mainly of dogs and horses of which there seemed to be an inordinate supply, not only on the farm but in the dining room. Horses, painted in oils, with brass name plates and moody expressions stared at me from the walls. Dogs panted, scratched, and thumped around our feet, although my liver-colored friend was not among them. A fat houseman served salad and was the only person present who could not be the murderer, and this was simply because he was fat.

I finished my pheasant. A large Siamese cat appeared in the door of the library and achieved the table top, a pheasant bone from my plate, and the library again with what appeared to be one leap. The dogs streamed after him. Nobody so much as lifted an eyebrow; baffled yells came presently from the library suggesting that the cat had eluded his pursuers; and dessert was placed on the table. Chloe Henderson suggested bridge and we adjourned to the library. A gun cabinet — *the* gun cabinet — was built into the wall across the room. Mrs. Henderson poured coffee and led the way to the bridge table.

"I live next door," she told me. "It's so dear of Horace to invite me to stay here while my house is being redecorated."

John Crandel gave her a glowering look. "You're a spendthrift, Chloe. You'd have done better to put that money in a new roof for your cattle barn."

She shrugged prettily. "I was thankful that I was here when the tragedy occurred. Poor Horace. I sent him a cable at once."

I noticed John glowering again, and then decided to risk a direct question. "You were referring to Lassiter Wellington's suicide? Horace wrote to me about it. Just how did it happen?"

Chloe Henderson said, "It was dreadful. None of us had any idea that he was thinking of such a thing. We were asleep and there was just the sound of the gun. Shocking. By the time we got thoroughly awake and the lights turned on and — as Lassiter didn't come into the hall, we went into his room — by that time he was — was dead. He must have died at once; I told Horace that."

I could think of nothing to say in response to this information and, as a matter of fact, I was still trying and failing to identify one of the three faces around the bridge table as the face of the photograph in my pocket.

Its existence was not due to chance. We had had some petty forgeries at the bank. Now I need not say that there is a certain prejudice in banking circles against forgery. There is also a sound reason for taking action regarding it for, as may not be generally known, a bank protects its depositors' accounts to the extent of making good any fraudulent checks which have been mistakenly cashed. So the forgeries had to be stopped and one of

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the measures we took was the installation of cameras at the tellers' windows, and a workable plan not only for quietly taking the picture of any face presenting itself at the window, but for filing the resultant photograph and the requisite data concerning it. The experiment had been in operation at the time of the Wellington forgery; a photograph of the person who had posed as Lassiter Wellington and boldly presented the forged check had been consequently available to me.

But the fact was, and I was obliged to accept it, the face in the photograph could have been almost anybody's face. Perhaps the teller had not chosen an auspicious moment for pressing the lever of the camera; the head was bent and the face shadowed by a hat pulled low over the eyes. But mainly it was one of those faces which seem to fade to complete anonymity before a camera — and I had perceived its anonymity only when the problem of specific identification presented itself. I was not even sure, now, whether it was the face of a man or a woman. The person pictured wore man's clothing, but women have on occasion successfully assumed man's dress. The face was a slender blob, the hair cut short. That was all.

And the three people around the table might each have been in a state of disguise so far as any likeness or unlikeness to the photograph was concerned. John Crandel was totally unremarkable; his was the kind of face one might see a hundred times a day and fail to note. Chloe Henderson, slender and attractive, was so heavily made up with eyebrow pencil, lipstick, and such that her face was like a painted mask.

And Lisa Benly, slender, too, was masked in another way; for she wore no make-up at all, which left her face a bare and slightly shining oval, as unremarkable as John Crandel's face. Mrs. Henderson's hair was black and curly; Lisa Benly's was straight and brown. But both women wore their hair cut very short. Inwardly I cursed the current feminine fashion — and wished that Horace Wellington had called on more expert assistance than mine.

Eventually the houseman waddled in with a tray of ice water and decanters and departed for the night, and Chloe Henderson yawned and said, "One more rubber" — and everyone and everything in the room froze.

I was aware of that before I knew what had happened, for I chanced to be watching Lisa Benly who suddenly and for no apparent reason turned perfectly white. A dog near me did not so much as lift his head, but his hackles rose. John Crandel gripped his cards so hard that they slowly crumpled. The cat stood soundlessly upright, arched his back and his tail, and his blue eyes turned ruby red. It was like a spell and a horrifying one put upon the room, yet there wasn't a sound. Then Chloe Henderson looked up, took in the situation with one

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swift glance, and said, "Good gracious! It's only Happy."

She turned to look over her shoulder and there in the doorway the Hound of the Wellingtons, my liver-colored friend, surveyed us. It is true that his silent regard did have something rather ominous about it, but as his eyes met mine his tail gave a tentative wag. Naturally I started to rise, intending to meet any friendly overture halfway, but Crandel seized my arm in a steely grip that clamped me to my seat. Chloe Henderson sprang up, advanced upon the creature, grasped his collar, and led him out of the room and upstairs.

Nobody moved until a door somewhere above closed. Lisa Benly then moistened her white lips and John Crandel laughed shakily. "We've got to do something about that dog. He's a killer. We ought to have let him die. He's not worth the vet's bill. He was Lassiter's dog, with him every instant. Only Lass could manage him — Lass and Chloe."

"That dog is no killer," I said indignantly, upon which Crandel and Lisa Benly both gave me a look of utter scorn.

Chloe Henderson returned. "I put him in Lass's room," she said. "I'll let him out when you've all gone to bed."

She sat down as Lisa Benly said she'd had enough of cards for the evening. Then under the pretense of getting out a handkerchief, I contrived at the same time to withdraw the photograph and drop it on the table.

I am not a brave man; neither am I an impulsive one. I daresay I acted merely on the principle of stirring up muddy waters to see what would happen. And the trouble was that, just then, nothing happened. All three, quite naturally, glanced at the photograph; I was sure of that. But Chloe Henderson merely put her cards together; John Crandel said he had to be at the horse barns early in the morning; Lisa Benly said good night and disappeared.

I restored the photograph to my pocket. The dogs surged up from various spots around the room and the cat leaped ahead of us and up the stairs.

It was a pleasant guest room to which Mrs. Henderson showed me, although rather full of chintz and photographs of horses and dogs. "I'm sorry Horace isn't here to see you," she said. "Horace and I — well, we're thinking of marriage, you know."

This explained not only her hostess-like manner, but some of Horace's anxiety. It did not, however, clear her of murder. I could not avoid the swift reflection that the removal of Lassiter Wellington had removed at the same time a contending heir, so to speak, to Horace's fortune. Also, Crandel had called her a spendthrift, and something — perhaps the banker's curiously developed sense of money and people — suggested to me that it was an accurate statement. So she might have forged a check, finding herself in need of cash, and when Lassiter

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accused her, she could have taken a desperate way out by killing young Lassiter. And, of course, without its mask of make-up, her face could have been that of the bank's photograph.

But then, Lisa Benly's face or John Crandel's could have been the face in the photograph, too. After uttering suitable remarks, I said, "I've never met Crandel before. Has he worked for Horace for a long time?"

"Five years," she replied. "Horace pays him well, you know. Too well, I think. John Crandel is only waiting until he can save enough money to buy a farm of his own. The minute he does that he'll leave Horace like a shot."

"I expect Miss Benly could carry on then."

Mrs. Henderson's eyes snapped. "Lisa," she said, "would do anything for money! I've advised Horace not to count on her. Good night, Mr. Wickwire."

With which she swept away, first ejecting a red setter and a spaniel who had drifted into the room, and remarking that she always shut the dogs in the kitchen before she released Happy who, I took it, prowled the house at night. I bolted the door only to discover that the Siamese cat had settled down among the framed pictures on top of a bookcase. He eyed me with shining blue slits which were eyes and refused to be dislodged.

So each of them, if I accepted unsolicited testimony, had a motive for forging and murder. Chloe, the spendthrift. Lisa who would do anything for money. John Crandel who was only biding his time until he could purchase his own place. I got out the photograph again — and as (study it though I might) the face remained a pale and anonymous smudge, I returned it impatiently to my pocket. It was the cat who initiated a point of exploration I ought to have undertaken in the beginning, but then I am no expert. Either from innate deviltry or because he wished to make himself more comfortable on the crowded bookcase, he put out a sepia-colored paw, gave a silver-framed picture a deliberate push, and then stretched his neck to follow its fall to the floor with a kind of smug interest. Naturally I went to pick up the picture. It was a group picture, five people in an admiring circle around a horse.

Horace Wellington, huge and fleshy, was smiling. A younger man, big too and fleshy, was obviously Lassiter Wellington, for he strongly resembled his uncle; clearly, if I had had any doubts, his was not the face of the forger. John Crandel stood nearby; before the camera his thin face took on harsh and predatory lines. Lisa Benly, in blue jeans and white shirt, held the bridle; her face, certainly bare of make-up, was a glistening oval, and Chloe Henderson looked like a film beauty in smart riding clothes. The horse looked bored, and I knew now who had forged the check and murdered Lassiter.

That is to say, I knew it logically; I knew of no way to prove it.

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A creature padded along the hall and sniffed under my door in such a ravening manner that I knew it was Happy. After a time he padded away again, and suddenly I thought: Lassiter's dog, who never left Lassiter, and would have permitted only Chloe Henderson to enter Lassiter's room — where he was killed.

I thought for some time; eventually a scrap of conversation from the previous evening floated into my mind and, if it meant what I thought it might mean, it could lead to something — I didn't know exactly what, but to something. I don't believe in hunches, yet perhaps they are in fact the sum total of observation and instinct. In any event, I went downstairs.

I made no attempt to move quietly; I was reasonably sure that somewhere there was a pair of wakeful and listening ears, warned by my possession of the photograph, and I wished them to record my activities. The dog Happy, of course, was on the prowl somewhere, but since I could not really accept the theory that he was a lurking fiend in canine shape, I only hoped that he would not bark and arouse the house. And halfway along the hall a cold nose suddenly thrust itself against my hand. It gave me rather a start, but after a moment it withdrew silently into the darkness, and I found my way into the library.

I left the door a little ajar to permit my voice to be overheard and groped my way to a telephone that I had observed standing on a table. Here, assisted by the operator who knew and rang the number I desired, I made a local call. The reply to my question was what I had thought it might be.

I waited for a moment, listening. After a time I was sure that I heard a faint sound from the hall. So I had to take some action, and since I could think of nothing else I put in a call via transatlantic telephone to Horace Wellington in his hotel in Rome — except I didn't, but held the switch firmly depressed. And all the time I listened.

When there was the whisper of the door opening I admit that my flesh crawled. But I shouted into the phone, as somehow one does shout over transatlantic phone, "Horace! I'm at the farm." I paused to lend verisimilitude to my pretended conversation; then replied to a question that hadn't been spoken. "Yes, Lassiter was murdered. Undoubtedly. And I know who did it. I've got evidence —" Here I paused again, thinking that Horace would have said something at this point — and thus heard a small but unmistakable click from across the room. It was the door of the gun cabinet, whose dangerous proximity to the telephone and to me I had completely forgotten.

I am not sure what I did then, but I believe I acted with alacrity, for all at once I was crouching behind the sofa with the voice of an aroused telephone operator sounding metallically from the table where I had dropped the telephone and thus released the switch. Other than that there was an

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utter and, I might say, extremely unnerving silence. I don't know how long it was before I sensed that some new element had added itself to the room.

There was still no sound; a sheerly atavistic instinct announced its presence to me. It identified itself, however, by a sudden and terrible growl. A chair went over with a thud. Revolver shots crashed through the darkness.

They stopped; their echoes died away. And in the silence arose a shrill and indescribably eerie scream.

The scream was that of the telephone operator. After a startled moment I realized that.

Then I crept toward the table, groped upward, found a lamp and turned on the light.

Lisa Benly stood with a gun in her hand, backed into a corner. The dog Happy made a dive at her throat just as I reached him, got both hands on his collar, and pulled back as hard as I could pull. Lisa screamed, "Hold him," and dropped the gun.

I shouted as loudly as I could, "Down, Happy! Down!"

I don't know why I expected him to obey, nor indeed why he obeyed, but he did drop down at my feet. Lisa Benly stared at me and put her hands over her face as Chloe Henderson and Crandel rushed into the room.

The police arrived within moments, summoned by the terrified telephone operator. There was considerable conversation, in which I found it rather difficult to engage owing to the dog who seemed agreeably moved by the rapport between us and made strenuous gestures of friendship.

I fended off his enormous paws as best I could and told the police that I believed Lisa Benly had forged the check; that Lassiter Wellington had had reason — probably we would never know exactly what reason — to suspect that she had used cards belonging to him for purposes of identification; that he had accused her and she had shot him.

"I don't know what she has done with the money, but I suggest you'll find it, possibly in a checking account under another name. Also," I got the bank's photograph from my pocket, "I suggest that you give this photograph and a framed picture in the guest room to experts for comparison."

The policemen looked as blank as the face in the photograph, so I was obliged to explain. "A camera does odd things to faces. Some faces seem to blank out and obscure; others leap into a great clarity of feature in a photograph — those of the movie stars, for instance. Mrs. Henderson's face, in the picture upstairs, is what is called photogenic in the extreme; her picture, indeed, is far more beautiful than she is in fact."

Mrs. Henderson gave a pained sort of murmur. I continued. "John Crandel's face is photogenic, too — although in a different way, as his features in a picture become decidedly ugly — I should say, rugged." John

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Crandel, surprisingly, seemed pleased. "On the other hand," I said, "there are faces which are remarkably unphotogenic. They seem to blank out almost unrecognizably before a camera. You have doubtless heard people say that no two pictures of them are alike and that none of their pictures resemble them.

"Miss Benly is one of those people; she is, in short, nonphotogenic. As is the face in this photograph. Since it is the photograph of one of these three people, and Crandel and Mrs. Henderson are eliminated, it is obviously the photograph of Lisa Benly."

It was not, however, so obvious to the police, even after I explained the photograph. They eyed me skeptically. However, one of them said dubiously, "She did have a gun."

"She may have intended me as a target, for she overheard what she took to be a conversation which was very dangerous to her. But, in fact, she shot at the dog. He is supposed to be a killer." Here, to my intense annoyance, Happy turned over on his back and rolled his eyes fondly at me. The policeman's look of skepticism deepened. Clearly, a more concrete piece of evidence was required so I gave it to them. "John Crandel is afraid of the dog. But Lisa Benly is terrified. The dog was devoted to Lassiter. She would not have dared enter Lassiter's room at night, had the dog been present.

"This evening Crandel said something about the dog's vet bill; I telephoned the vet a short time ago. He said that the dog was in his care the night Lassiter was shot; he said the dog had been poisoned. I suggest that she poisoned him to get him out of the way — and I rather think that you'll find that she procured poison at some drug store in the vicinity and gave a farm need as her reason for buying it."

Here John Crandel made his only, but a pertinent, remark. "Arsenic. Said she got it for rats. Bought it the afternoon before Lass was shot."

"Now *that*," said one of the policemen, "is more like *evidence*." But he stretched out his hand for the photograph. The gesture affected Happy adversely. I was obliged to drag him upstairs with me, in order to procure the framed group picture for the police. And here I had rather a shock.

I merely glanced in the mirror. The face in the mirror — my own face — was blanked out by the bright overhead light. It was completely anonymous.

While I have always known that mine is an undistinguished sort of face, still I cannot say that it was gratifying to discover that it, too, in a picture, could be anybody's face.

I had another shock a few days after Horace Wellington's return; this was an enormous crate, delivered at the bank, with a card attached to the outside and hair-raising howls from the inside. Before I could stop him, the expressman opened the crate, gave a wild shout, and made for the door, pursued hotly by a large, fa-

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miliar and liver-colored form. Guards came running; patrons took to counter tops. The note was from Horace Wellington and began,

"Dear Jim:

"Happy is pining; Chloe says for you. Well, dogs are like that. He requires only about ten miles a day exercise and prefers steak, say five pounds to a meal —"

I read no further, but returned Happy to the crate.

I should say, I attempted to return Happy to the crate. However, he is not incapable of compromise and has settled for a run around the Reservoir and, since I am only a banker, no steaks — although his diet is supplemented by such rugs, table legs, and shoes as he fancies.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

MAN ON A ROPE *by GEORGE HARMON COXE* (KNOPF, $2.75)	"... the pace, fast ... tone, realistic and masculine." (H-M)	"... considerable geography; pro job, as expected. Smooth." (SC)
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AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key at bottom gives sources.

LEAD WITH YOUR LEFT *by ED LACY* (HARPER, $2.95)	". . . absorbing . . . writing . . . crisp and effective . . ." (AB)	". . . crisp, acid story with plenty of action . . . Good." (AdV)
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DEAD INDEED *by M. R. HODGKIN* (MACMILLAN, $2.95)	". . . wonderful background and a gay touch . . . plot is very nearly hopeless." (LGO)	"Sprightly dialogue but thin motivation." (H-M)
A TREASURY OF GREAT MYSTERY STORIES *edited by HAYCRAFT & BEECROFT* (SIMON & SCHUSTER, $5.95)	". . . excellent up-to-minute anthology; large variety of treatments and techniques . . ." (SC)	"Anthology to end all anthologies . . . Meticulously chosen, handsomely presented . . . Jackpot." (AdV)

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

H-M.: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT TWOHY**

TITLE: ***Never Anything But Trouble***

TYPE: Crime Story à la **Black Mask**

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Surprisingly terse and tough, surprisingly full-bodied in characterization for a "first story." No doubt about it: "Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not the goal."*

THE GIRL LAY BACK ON THE WHITE sofa. She said, "Pour me another martini, Floydy."

"Pour your own martini."

The languid smile slipped from her face, and she looked at him with apprehension. He was holding a cigar tight in his thick lips, and scowling at a racing program.

"That damn billygoat. An animal like that, they ought to take him out and shoot him."

"Did you drop a lot, Floydy?"

"Eight thousand bucks, that's all. I told you that ten times."

"You need something to change your luck."

He looked at her. She smiled, parting her lips.

The white telephone on the stand by the table tingled.

She said, "Let it ring."

He said, "For Pete's sake, I'm a businessman."

He got up from his chair and moved heavily to the phone.

"Yeah?"

"This Floyd Weber?"

"Yeah?"

"You don't know me. I've got something to talk to you about."

"So talk."

"This phone tapped?"

"How the hell should I know?"

"Hang up, Floydy," said the girl. She had reached over to pour herself another drink from the shaker on the near table. She waved the glass gently to and fro, and smiled at the shining liquid. "Hang up," she said softly. She was pretty. Ten years ago she had been even prettier. Ten

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years ago she was going to be a great and beautiful actress, and handsome men would look at her yearningly . . .

"Listen," said the sharp, clear voice into Weber's ear. "This is important. There's a bar near your apartment —The Glass Slipper. Know it?"

"Yeah."

"Be there in twenty minutes. They have a phone booth. I'll call you there."

"Listen, who the hell—"

Weber pressed his lips together and stared at the dead phone, then put it back in its cradle. He walked to the center of the room, hooked his thumbs in his belt, and scowled at the rich beige rug under his feet.

"Who was that, Floydy?"

He didn't answer.

She drank the gin, put the glass down, and smiled at him fuzzily.

"Was it a girl? Was it another girl?"

He said harshly, "You're just about washed up."

"What? What, Floyd?"

"They come and they go. You've just about had it."

The phone call had jarred him. What was it—more trouble for him? Never anything but trouble, he thought bitterly. Never any peace or safety. He felt small, oppressed, beset by enemies, and he laughed harshly at this woman, who was weaker than he. "You got a complexion beginning to look like an old blotter," he said. "It figures—the way you soak it up. Why is it girls start out nice, then turn into soaks?"

She stared at him, seeing herself, what she had become, in his eyes. Then she closed her eyes.

"Just yours, Floyd," she whispered. "Just your girls."

When she opened her eyes, he had his hat and coat on.

She said dully, "Where are you going?"

"Out."

"We were going to dinner."

"That's right. You're so right. We were."

He tossed a couple of bills at her.

"Buy yourself a steak. Or a quart of gin. And lock the door before you go out of here."

He went out—a short, fat, scowling man in rich clothes. The rich odor of his brown cigar hung behind him in the apartment.

The phone jangled. Weber growled at the bartender, "It's for me."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Weber."

He closed the door of the booth.

"Weber?"

"Yeah."

"All right. Now listen good. I'm going to kill a guy for you."

Weber took the phone from his mouth and stared at it. Then he grated, "What is this, a joke?"

"No joke. Hyde. I'm going to kill Jack Hyde for you."

Weber breathed deeply a moment. Then he said, "What are you, a cop?"

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"No. Listen, I know where Hyde is."

"Where is he?"

"You'd like to know." The voice laughed. "You'd love to know. You've been looking for him the past three months. So have the cops. It's a race. Well, you win. Because I'm going to kill him for you."

"You sound like some hopped-up punk."

"I want ten grand for the job."

"You're crazy."

"That's all right. You don't have to say anything . . . Thursday night, tomorrow night. About midnight. You and your top men, you be out in public somewhere. Have plenty of witnesses. They won't be able to touch you."

"How about you?"

"I'm all right. I'm just a guy down the street. Just a neighbor. There's no reason I'd want to kill him."

"You must be some particularly dumb cop. Or a reporter. You a reporter?"

"You'll read about it in the papers. A month or so, I'll contact you. Arrange for the money."

"I get it. It's a gag. All right, I can go along with a gag. How'll I know you?"

"I'll say Jack Hyde recommended me."

"It's funny. It's the funniest thing I've heard for five minutes."

"Read your Friday papers," said the voice, and the phone clicked.

Weber put the receiver slowly back on the hook. He stood there a few seconds. Then he went back to the bar.

"Scotch and water."

Ten thousand, he thought. Did the guy mean it? Sounded like it. Voice sharp, hard, sure of itself. It would be worth ten thousand. Worth ten times ten thousand . . . because if the cops got Hyde first, he, Weber, would burn.

Hyde . . . he should have finished Hyde a long time ago, Weber said to himself. Hyde had been going soft. Hyde wanted out. Too old for the rackets. Weber had seen it coming. Should have acted then. But he'd delayed. Hadn't wanted to—Hyde was an old hand. Once he'd been useful.

When Hyde had got that Grand Jury subpoena, three months ago, Weber had decided to act. But it was too late. Hyde had taken off, lost himself. A lot of people had been hunting for him since. Nobody but Weber knew how desperately he had hunted. The smart newspaper boys had got wind of it, and hinted. This guy, whoever he was, that had just called, must have picked up the hint. Smelled the money, the money he could make. Well, lucky for him. And lucky for Weber.

Weber smiled. Money. You had the money, and the luck followed. So it was, so it would always be. Nothing was ever going to happen to Weber.

Lou Pease slept late. He was on a short vacation. Yesterday he had re-

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turned from a week's trip, and tomorrow—Friday—he was slated to take another trip. There was a lot of traveling in Pease's job. He was an insurance investigator. Once he had been a cop, but that had been years ago. He had a couple of souvenirs from the old job—a scar on the side of his neck, from a bank robber's bullet; and a gun.

Pease woke up, smelled bacon frying in the kitchen, and heard Claire moving around in there. Today was the day, he thought. He didn't feel nervous. Alert, but not nervous. A job was a job. This was a job.

He thought of Jack Hyde. He wondered how Hyde was feeling this morning. Any uneasiness, any vague foreboding?

Probably not. Probably Hyde was feeling fine.

Because Hyde thought he had it made. Three months he had lived in the neighborhood. He'd rented a small cottage, four houses south of Pease, and across the street. The neighborhood knew him as John Wilson. He was clean-shaven, sandy-haired, wore thin rimless glasses, and was developing a paunch. He looked like a moderately prosperous, retired businessman. In his sober gray suit he was the acme of respectability. Who would take him for a gunman hiding out?

Pease hadn't. He'd seen him, off and on, for over a month, without taking any interest in him. He wouldn't have recognized him at all—if it hadn't been for chess.

Pease, lying in bed, remembered the morning that Wilson had strolled up to him, as he was watering the neat, tablecloth-sized lawn in front of his house.

"You're Mr. Pease, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"I'm John Wilson."

Wilson had stretched out his hand. Pease had taken the soft white hand, bristling with short, dark-brown hairs.

"I hear you're a chess player."

"That's right," said Pease, and wondered where Wilson had heard it. Pease didn't have much to do with his neighbors. But neighbors had a way of knowing things you'd never suspect were known outside your own home. "I play a little," he said.

"Like to play me sometime? I'm crazy about the game."

"Sure. You know I travel a lot, and I'm going away this week, but when I come back—"

"Anytime. I'm alone and up late every night. Just ring anytime."

Pease recalled that first meeting, and he smiled thinly up at the ceiling. I'll ring tonight, he said. And I'll have a friend with me.

A few nights after Wilson had introduced himself, Pease played chess with Wilson, in Wilson's house. Pease was a good player, but he was beaten three times running.

He said, "You play a fine game."

"I'm rusty. Used to play a lot."

Wilson had stretched out his hand, to gather in some stray pieces to put

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in the box. His shirt-cuff rode up slightly and Pease saw a small blue star tattooed on the soft white flesh of Wilson's wrist.

The investigator's eyes narrowed, his brain tried to churn up a recollection. Who did he know with a blue star on his wrist? Someone . . . he knew someone . . .

Later that night Pease had sat in the dark, smoking, working up the recollection. It came in fragments. The star . . . and somehow chess was tied in. A man with a tattooed star and a passion for chess . . . a dark man, because, though Wilson's hair was light, the bristly hair on his hands and shadows on his cheeks at night were dark. A man who had come into the neighborhood three months before . . .

On the third cigarette the memory came through. The newspaper picture of Hyde, that had been run in the papers quite steadily after his disappearance, until it ceased to be news and the papers got tired of running it, floated up, clear and detailed, into Pease's mind. And the lines of print under it: *Wanted by the police for questioning . . . 6 feet 1, 190 pounds, dark brown hair, brown mustache, small star tattooed on left wrist. If you see this man, contact your local . . .*

Pease put aside the bed covers, and got up. I could have been a civic hero, he said to himself, and got my picture in the paper. Too bad. But I'd rather be anonymous—and rich.

He went into the bathroom, and was annoyed to see that Claire had left the top off the tube of toothpaste. There was a smear of toothpaste on the washbowl, too, and he wiped it out with a piece of toilet paper. Damn Claire! Pease hated sloppiness.

He shaved, studying his thin, bony face in the mirror. His pale eyes looked back at him blandly. No strain showing. Why should it? He felt no strain.

Weber was probably feeling strain, this morning. You couldn't blame him. He didn't know Pease. If he knew Pease, he wouldn't be worrying.

Once before Pease had killed a man. That was when he was a cop. Not the robber that had creased him—that one had got away. The other was a kid, 19 or so, whom Pease had surprised in a burglary attempt. The kid had bolted from the store. Pease hadn't shouted after him. He'd just stood still, let the kid get up to the head of the alley, let him silhouette himself against the street light, and then, feeling a surge of exhilaration, had squeezed the trigger . . . He'd told the Commissioner that he was shooting for the leg, and had missed. But he hadn't missed. He'd been right on target. Right in the small of the back . . .

He put his shaving things away, went back to the bedroom and dressed, putting on jeans and a flannel shirt. He strolled into the kitchen. Claire was just setting his break-

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fast on the table. It was a good one, eggs and bacon and toast done just right, and he complimented her on it. She looked surprised, then gave him a nervous little smile. She looked pretty, he thought, appraising her—except that her robe was wrinkled and her silver-blonde hair had some loose strands—but she was a nice-looking woman. Then he smiled to himself, because there were plenty of nice-looking women—and a lot younger than Claire.

He thought he'd leave her five hundred. That would do her all right—she could get a job, she'd worked before. She'd probably be glad, after he had gone. Maybe hook up with someone more her style.

Pease grinned. She'd never liked the rough stuff—always a little scared of him, never knew why he'd be nice, then suddenly pull the rough stuff. Why? He didn't know why. He just liked to. It was his way. What was the fun having a woman if you didn't rough her up?

He'd travel, Pease thought—take a trip to South America. A smart Yankee who had leisure to settle down, look around, make some connections, ought to do all right down there.

When he was having his coffee and cigarette, he told Claire that he thought he'd take a little trip that day.

"Oh. I thought you didn't have to go till Friday."

"I'm going up to Sid's cabin, at Silver Lake. I'd like to get in a little fishing." Sid was his brother, a storekeeper in a town upstate.

She said, hesitantly, "I don't have any clean stuff ready for you."

"That's all right. I'll be back tomorrow. Maybe even tonight, if it's too cold up there."

He'd be back tonight, all right, but she wouldn't see him. Nor would anyone else who knew him. Except Hyde.

He went back into the bedroom, got shorts, socks, and pajamas from his drawer, put them in a small leather bag. Then, from way back on a high shelf in his closet, he took down a shoe box. He took out the glistening .38 and the box of ammo. Wrapping them in a towel, he tucked them down among the clothes in the bag. He put the shoe box back on the shelf.

"So long," he said to Claire, passing through the living room where she was vacuuming.

"You think you might be back tonight?"

"I might be. Tonight or tomorrow."

He drove the forty miles to the cabin leisurely, stopping on the way for lunch, and it was early afternoon when he got to the cabin. As he had known, Sid wasn't there—he never used the place this time of year.

Pease got the key from under the step and let himself in. He had a can of beer that he had bought at a grocery near the lunch stop, and then he lay down on the cot in the bedroom, with a magazine, and

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spent the rest of the afternoon in the cabin.

It was a quiet, rough-hewn place, on a steep, wooded hillside. There were no cabins nearby, and no one to say what time he had arrived, or departed.

When it got dark, Pease brewed himself some coffee—that was all he wanted. After he'd drunk it, he loaded the pistol.

He went through a closet where he knew Sid kept old clothes, and found an old brown overcoat and a gray hat, and decided that they would do fine. He laid them out on a chair, and then there was nothing to do but wait.

He turned on the radio, got some pleasant music, went back to his magazine. His mind wandered from the story he was reading, but he forced himself to keep at it. If he didn't read he'd think, and there was nothing to think about—it was all planned on rails. At this stage, thinking just made you jumpy, and you began to worry about consequences. He just sat still in his chair, reading the magazine and half-listening to the radio, and at last his watch said 9:30.

He drove back to town, driving carefully, alert to every signal marker on the highway. It was a cool dark night, with no moon. The center of town was jazzy with lights, fighting the dark—out in the suburbs there were only the street lights and scatterings of light from the houses he passed. It was 11:00 o'clock now. With tomorrow a working day and a school day, the families in the neat stucco houses had gone to sleep, or were getting ready to. Pease figured he was a bit early, so he drove around the suburbs for a while. When his watch said 11:20, he headed for his own neighborhood.

He parked in front of a vacant lot, three blocks from his home. All the houses on this block were dark—no lights showing, everyone asleep. With the old gray hat pulled low, and the overcoat buttoned up, Pease stepped out toward his own block.

He walked casually; if anyone should happen to be glancing out, he was a casual stroller, who'd taken a walk and was now returning home. On the three blocks he walked, the only lights he saw were two street lights on each block. Except one. Hyde's light was on—he saw the lighted shade from half a block away.

He went up the walk to the porch, pressed the bell, and stood there, hands in his pockets. After about twenty seconds he heard Hyde's voice through the door:

"Who is it?"

"Pease."

The door opened a crack—it was on a chain. A slice of Hyde's pale face showed. Pease stood quietly. Then the chain slid off.

"Come in."

Pease stepped into the hall.

"I thought you'd gone to the country."

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Hyde was in shirt, slacks, and slippers. Looking beyond him into the living room, Pease saw a highball by a chair, and a down-turned book.

"I came back. Too cold. Wondered if you'd like a game. You said anytime."

"Sure."

Pease lingered in the hall as Hyde went on into the living room. As Hyde's back was turned, Pease took out the gun. He moved to the door of the living room, and with the gun pointed at Hyde, waited.

Hyde had gone toward his chair and got his glass. He turned, saying, "What can I fix you . . ." His eyes went wide as he stopped talking and stared at the gun. His mouth twitched slightly. "Is this a gag?"

"It's real." Pease was enjoying Hyde's look.

Hyde breathed hard, but he didn't move. He stood stiffly, as if, by not moving, he would stay alive. He watched the gun. After a few moments he whispered, "You gone crazy?"

"No."

Hyde said carefully, "Pease, you're making a mistake. It's not what you think. This won't do any good."

"It won't do you any good, that's for sure," said Pease, and he laughed softly.

He was watching for it, and as he saw the sudden tightening in Hyde's shoulder, the tightening of fingers on the highball glass, Pease fired. Hyde's intended lunge became a fall. The highball glass hit the rug and rolled to Pease's feet.

Pease watched Hyde, on his knees, come up, one hand grabbing at the chair, as if to drag himself up. Pease calmly squeezed the trigger again, blasting another bullet into Hyde's chest. Hyde fell over on his face and lay still.

Pease slipped the gun into his pocket, and switching off the lamp, so he wouldn't be silhouetted, he went to the door. He lingered a couple of seconds, listening, and then he opened it and stepped out.

He walked toward the curb, then turned toward his car, three blocks away. He walked swiftly, but he didn't run. When he was a block away, he looked back. Light showed in a couple of houses, one on the corner, one across the street from Hyde's house. Ahead of him was a quiet, sleeping block.

Pease kept on at the same swift, but not hurrying pace, and two minutes after he had squeezed the second shot into Hyde he was in his car, had it in gear, and was driving smoothly away.

A little after 1:00 A.M. he pulled into the clearing next to the cabin. Stars winked down at him from a blue-black sky.

He entered the cabin, and the first thing he did was roll the gun and ammunition box back up in the towel and put it in the leather bag. Then he hung the coat back in the closet and put the hat where it had been on the shelf.

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Then he got Sid's whiskey bottle from under the sink and poured himself a long shot—not so much as a nerve steadier—his nerves were all right—but as a reward.

He drank with enjoyment, and because he had not eaten since noon, it began to hit him pretty fast. He felt a little whoozy, but relaxed and peaceful when he pulled on his pajamas and climbed onto the cot.

"The dope," he muttered. Hyde hadn't even had a gun on him. A guy like that—he'd really done him a favor. Hyde was too stupid to live . . .

"Wake up, Pease."

Pease snapped over in the bed, then pushed himself up. Two men stood in the room. Big men. One of them had something in his hand that glittered. A gun.

It was morning, but early. The sky was barely light and he could hear the drowsy call of night birds. But the light was on in the main room of the cabin, and he could see the two men clearly.

He'd slept hard. He cursed that long nightcap. Even so, they must have come up very quietly. Who were they? Weber's men?

"You'd better get dressed," said one of them.

"What is it?"

"Police. You're under arrest."

"What'd I do?"

"Murdered Jack Hyde."

Pease's head was spinning. This was ridiculous, this was a nightmare. What an odd way the guy was holding the gun. With a pencil through the trigger guard. Suddenly Pease's mouth went dry, because he'd recognized his own gun.

"Recently been fired." The cop looked at the gun thoughtfully. "You should have thrown it away."

"I don't know what you're talking about." His voice was a croak.

"Come off it, Pease. We've got you cold. Gun, motive, everything. You want to tell us the story?"

"I don't know any stories." It was a lost game, he knew it inside. But what had gone wrong? He stalled. "Who is it I'm supposed to have killed?"

"Jack Hyde. Only you knew him as Wilson. We wanted him. Had things to ask him."

The other cop said, "First we thought Weber had done it. Or arranged to have it done. Then we looked around the house. We found lipstick, hairpins—other stuff. So we talked to the neighbors. They all knew about it."

"Knew about what?"

The cop with the gun said, "Come off it, Pease. She told us all about it."

The other one said, "You found out about it. You killed Hyde. You didn't know he was Hyde, she didn't either. She thought he was just a nice, gentle guy . . . they were going to go away together. But why am I telling you all this? You know it already."

Pease stared at them. After a few seconds he began to laugh.

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The cop said, "Something funny?"

"Hairpins and stuff," said Pease. "I always liked things neat. What can you do when you've got a sloppy wife?"

The phone rang. She was sitting on the white sofa, and she got up to answer it.

"Hello?"

"Oh—this Florence?"

"Yes."

"Say, I want to speak to Mr. Weber."

"Oh. Well—he can't come to the phone now."

"Well, I just wanted to ask if he's seen the morning paper?"

"Yes, he has."

"Well, I just wanted to be sure he'd read about it. Guess he's pleased, huh?" said the voice guardedly.

"He was pleased," she said. "I guess he was. I know he was sitting in the kitchen, reading the paper and laughing, when I let myself in."

"You sound funny. Anything the matter?"

"No," she said.

She hung up. She sat a moment and then went to the kitchen door to look at him, sitting there in the chair, with his head on the newspaper that was spread out on the table. Blood had run onto the paper and some had fallen on the glistening black floor.

She studied the little hole in the back of his head, and wondered what his face looked like, pressed flat on the table.

She sighed. She didn't know if she had done a wrong thing or not. But she had worked it all out in her mind before she'd come up this morning, and it had been something she had known she had to do.

She said, in a wooden voice, "There won't be any more for you to turn into soaks."

She went back to the white sofa and sat down—a woman who looked middle-aged, although only ten years ago she was going to be a great and beautiful actress, and handsome young men were going to look at her yearningly . . .

NEXT MONTH . . .

AGATHA CHRISTIE
PAT STADLEY
DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JANET GREEN**

TITLE: ***The Tallest Man in the World***

TYPE: Crime-Suspense Story

LOCALE: England and the Continent

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A strange, utterly fascinating story that we guarantee will haunt you. Yes, you will never quite forget this tale of the Giant Strong Man and the Six Dwarfs, this intimate glimpse behind the scenes of European theatrical life.*

I GAVE UP THE IDEA OF SLEEP AND lay waiting for the dawn. Night showed black through a chink in the heavy hotel curtains. When the black became opaque, I slipped out of bed, crossed to the window, pulled back the curtains, and watched the first light creep over the top of Edinburgh Castle and spread through the railings along Princes Street.

Then I saw it.

The tallest man in the world. Swinging from the lamppost, its coat tails dancing in the wind; and in the distance Maxie running. He hardly seemed to touch the ground, he ran so fast.

I pulled trousers on over pajamas, grabbed my topcoat, and raced down the well of the stairs. Round and round and out of the hotel.

I had to catch Maxie.

As I pelted across the tram lines, my mind went back to the beginning. Open at the Music Hall in Birmingham, close at the Alhambra in Edinburgh, and in between a long string of rich dates . . .

Big Maxie was flying in from Stockholm with the six Dwarfs. I remembered the morning well. A clear bright day and my heart so light as I drove the big man's Rolls to the airport. The Indian summer we had been so grateful for had tempted Papa Gaudin to keep his

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circus playing four more weeks and Maxie was booked to open at the Music Hall in Birmingham on the following night without his usual vacation.

I hoped he would like the supporting bill. The dates I knew would please him. All short journeys and top capacities. Maxie was never happy when the Dwarfs spent their Sundays in the car. He liked the little men to be in the new town for lunch so that they could see and be seen. The Dwarfs loved admiration, and Maxie would laugh and encourage them to strut and posture for it wherever they went. He had loved the Dwarfs as if they were his children since he first met them just after the war as he was making his way from Vilna across war-wrecked Europe to Paris, where Papa Gaudin was getting the Big Top out of moth balls.

At Dusseldorf they did not like Maxie's papers and flung him into a D.P. camp. For three days he tried to bang his way out, but could find nobody with the time to listen to him or the authority to help him. He has told me since that he never felt so frustrated and helpless in all his life.

Coming from one more futile attempt to get some sense out of the overworked officials, he walked beside the barbed wire and looked out on the world that had abandoned him. Suddenly a thick and nauseating smell offended his nostrils and Maxie knew the latrines were near.

Then he saw them. Behind the stinking sheds. Six Dwarfs poised in the shape of a pyramid.

He stood in the noisome shadows and watched. The formation broke and the Dwarfs turned somersaults, hand springs, and cartwheels, until they had placed themselves in the shape of a new pyramid, working all the time with deftness and precision. Maxie knew that he was in the presence of performers akin to himself and felt like the man lost in a strange country who suddenly hears his own language spoken. Not till the Dwarfs stopped and left the place did Maxie's nostrils once again complain.

Each day for a week he came back. The six Dwarfs were always there—a bunch of bedraggled little men rehearsing with an indomitable belief in their future. Maxie knew that as long as he was in that camp of forgotten people, the courage they showed would draw him to their side like a magnet.

On the eighth day Maxie saw an official attempt to move them away and heard the myopic one in the horn-rimmed spectacles whom the others called Spiro protest, saying in French that he had found the only place in the camp where they could rehearse their act without fear of disturbance or interruption. Nobody, the little man insisted, wanted to come to the corner behind the latrines. The harassed, overworked official, tired no doubt of endless questions and complaints in so many

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different languages, gave Spiro a push and the Dwarf sprawled on the ground; then the official felt himself lifted in the air by a massive hand that held him by the collar of his shirt, while a great blond giant said in Polish, "They are performers. They must rehearse."

I imagined how, when Maxie released him, the official would go—quickly.

The Dwarfs saw the giant Maxie pick up Spiro and, sitting him on his wide hand to bring him level with his face, look at him carefully, toss him high in the air, then catch him in his arms like a ball. And the Giant laughed. A deep, warm laugh that told the Dwarfs he was their ally.

Spiro saw the possibilities at once. He was an erudite little man and, of course, he had read Swift. He told Maxie the story of Gulliver's Travels and together they worked out the details of a new act.

Maxie and the Dwarfs rehearsed all the hours of every day that it was light until they reached perfection; then they waited for a night without a moon, and went under the barbed wire.

Maxie found Papa Gaudin at Liège.

The old French showman has never tired of telling how they came, walking into the center of the Big Top as he was rehearsing the Liberty horses. Maxie, with all six Dwarfs on his shoulders, in his arms, all over him. Papa Gaudin embraced Maxie, who was the best and bravest Strong Man he knew, and the little men dropped to the ring where they waited. The Dwarfs knew they were safe. Spiro had told them that Maxie and they were one.

Papa Gaudin had learned to trust his instinct. He knew quality when he saw it. Maxie and the six Dwarfs went into the Circus that night. They were great then, but became greater during the succeeding months.

Maxie was the Showman of the outfit. Spiro was the brains. I never saw that Dwarf without an armful of books. When he stood by himself and you shut your eyes to his puniness, he looked like a Professor in his well-worn Norfolk jacket. He had great knowledge and lost no opportunity to air it. I never trusted Spiro. I was repelled by him the first day we met. I resented the way he always behaved like a full-sized man. I like a Dwarf to stay a Dwarf . . .

As the airport came in sight, I drove past an advertising billboard. A comely blonde testified that somebody's toothpaste could be relied upon to give me that winning smile. I cursed the lady for reminding me of Del Roy and her trapeze act, then quickly put on armor against the thought. I had not forgotten Spiro's ban on acrobats of any kind, but when Frankie Diamond's troupe split up I saw the

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chance to snatch his magnificent itinerary of dates. I was forced to take his bill as it stood and that included one trapeze performer. I told myself that Spiro would have to swallow Del Roy. That string of plum dates would surely sweeten the mouthful.

I had the photographers waiting when the plane touched down. Maxie came out onto the steps with the Dwarfs, who hardly had time to see the cameras before they climbed onto his shoulders and from there made a line-up on the fuselage. I hated to see them preen themselves, busily tightening the belts of their camel's-hair coats and fingering the snapbrims of their Tyrolean hats. They dressed like Maxie right down to their pigskin gloves and smart buckskin shoes.

I admitted to myself that it was good showmanship, with Maxie pretending he did not know where they had gone. The big blond Giant made a fool of by the tiny men. The movie cameras took it all in and I was grateful. No act is too big to turn its back on that kind of publicity.

When Maxie saw me he waved and a grin spread over his face. I always found time to meet Maxie myself. In summer's sun, winter's frost, whether it was plane, train, or boat, I was there; yet he never failed to look surprised and grateful because I had come to meet him.

I was happy that day as I walked quickly to greet the big man. To be with Maxie was like standing on a rock in front of the sea getting a good blow, after you had been holed up in a room for a year with no ventilation. I loved the look of Maxie. He was huge and well-set in legs, body, and arms. His golden hair grew in tight, defiant curls close to his head. His eyes were gray and laughing. Maxie was full of good ways and had no evil in him. No, not any.

Together we got the six Dwarfs through the Customs. The cameras followed all the way. Spiro gave his usual interview in impeccable English. He had a great line—the pocket acrobat who understood Joyce and Bernard Shaw. When Maxie thought that Spiro had said enough, he put his hand gently on the Dwarf's shoulder. Spiro stopped as soon as he felt the kindly pressure. He appeared to be devoted to Maxie, but I was never without the feeling that one day I would find Spiro's knife between those massive shoulder blades.

I was wrong about Spiro. He did love Maxie. Simply and completely.

When we drove out of the airport, Maxie was at the wheel. I sat beside him and the Dwarfs were in the back. As we passed the billboard advertising the blonde's teeth, they almost bit me. I thought of Del Roy and told Maxie at once that the new bill I had taken over for him opened with a trapeze act. I felt Spiro's garlic-laden breath on the back of my neck and hastened to explain why

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it had been impossible to drop Del Roy. Maxie nodded satisfied, and I heard Spiro talking to the Dwarfs in some language they all understood.

I was never without an uncanny feeling about those Dwarfs. They seemed like one entity, with Spiro as the Head and the others the Body. That was how I always thought of them. Spiro and the Body.

I smelled the garlic again and knew that Spiro was back of my neck. "As long as the act is up to standard, we're happy," he said.

I felt the garlic recede and was happy myself.

As soon as we left Uxbridge behind us, Maxie pulled the Rolls up under the shade of a tree and asked Spiro for the nuts. I never knew what was coming next with Maxie but was prepared for anything.

He put his hand in his pocket and brought out two little furry creatures, placing them on his blue silk handkerchief. I thought they were moles, till Maxie said softly, "Golden Hamsters. Aren't they pretty?"

Spiro dropped a small packet of nuts into Maxie's lap and the big man fed the tiny animals. They filled their little cheeks till they bulged and their bright eyes shone.

Maxie laughed and laughed. The Dwarfs delighted in his happiness.

When the Golden Hamsters bulged enough, Maxie put them back in his pocket. I turned and looked inquiringly at Spiro.

"Maxie thought their cage was too small," he said.

"A nasty fine if you'd been caught smuggling those things through," I told Maxie.

"We'll get a cage for them in the next town." He smiled.

After we bought the cage and the Golden Hamsters were bedded down, Maxie began to sing a lewd French number that I always thought of as his song. He would render it in all sorts of languages, as the mood took him. The Dwarfs joined in. They knew the tune and the language did not matter to them. The effect was Babel.

The song saw us all the way to Birmingham. As we waited sometimes for the traffic lights to change, I could see how the Dwarfs amused the occupants of other cars. Only once a man and a woman watched gravely, and I knew that someone else felt as I did. Dwarfs should be quiet and never draw attention to themselves—the way a two-tongued man should hide his head.

I buried the thought and became glad that Maxie was having fun. I knew he would be in a high state of nerves by the time he opened on the following night. It was always the same when he brought the act from the tent to the stage; and that year there had been no interim of rest.

It turned out that I was right. Maxie was so nervous that he stayed in his dressing room till Spiro called him.

Spiro never trusted call boys.

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Come to that, Spiro never trusted anybody.

Once again Maxie and the six Dwarfs were a smash hit. I watched the act from the back of the circle, and listening to the applause and laughter around me felt guilty because I alone seemed to find the Dwarfs repugnant. Spiders and snakes do it to some people; with me it's Dwarfs.

I never told Maxie how I felt about his "children" and would shake hands all round as if they were my oldest and dearest friends. My bonhomie was so convincing that they were very fond of me and liked to touch me. Imagine how it would feel to a man who hated spiders to have one stroke his cheek.

I know my business though. I give the customers what they want. It would be all the same to me if they plumped for a couple of talking pythons.

The *mise en scène* against which Maxie and the Dwarfs performed was enchanting: a Lilliputian Town Square, with Maxie towering above the roof tops and the Dwarfs popping in and out of windows and doors. Two of the little men, both exactly alike, did an impossible tumbling trick. Actually they were not even related. Born at opposite ends of Europe, I believe. But people loved the idea of twin dwarfs and would talk about it in the bar afterwards, making all sorts of indecent conjectures. Of course it was Spiro who saw to it that they both dyed their hair the identical shade of fiery red.

The smallest Dwarf was a Spaniard. He played the trumpet, and at times I felt he could have topped the bill on his own. Spiro had him grow a Vandyke beard. Hair grows on their faces just the way it does on a full-sized man.

The one who wore the fez, a squat, swarthy Turk, running a little to fat, had the happy trick of throwing up no less than sixteen balls at one time. They dropped into pockets all over him—on his shoulders, on his heels, and on the inner sides of his sleeves—while the Turk stood quite still and did nothing. What a round of applause he won for himself! But I swear it was no bigger than the round that went to the thin, pale Dwarf from Lithuania who walked the tightrope and danced. He looked like something that came from under a mushroom, and Spiro permitted him a maximum weight. He was not allowed to go half an ounce over. Of course, ounces are pounds with those people. I used to feel sorry for the skinny little beggar when he was dieting. I once slipped him some fudge, but it was back in my brief case the same night, and I knew that it was Spiro who had put it there.

Spiro made wisecracks and spun ropes that writhed like tiny snakes in his small fat hands. He also recited poetry. His "Once more unto the breach, dear friends" was quite

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a performance. It stopped the show, even on a Saturday night.

All that made it seem as if Maxie did nothing, but when you added the score it was everything.

The finale of their act was the Gulliver routine—the one they had worked out in the D.P. camp. It began with Spiro putting the lasso round Maxie; then all the Dwarfs, giggling and chattering, caught him in a net and brought him to the ground. From a diminutive house the Dwarfs brought multicolored staples, hammers, mallets, and tried to fix the big man to the stage. Suddenly there would be a great roll on the kettle drums, and the pinioned man would rise, pulling up the net with him and the Dwarfs with the net. Then Maxie started to turn. As he went faster and faster, the Dwarfs clung to the ends of the net and the mirrors which each held in his hand caught the lights and made a dazzling moving pattern over the house. It looked like an animated carousel at a fair, heightened by the specially orchestrated music which sounded like that of a calliope. The whole picture was breathtaking and the customers cheered. I stood up and cheered with them.

I had plenty to cheer about. I was Maxie's agent. I collected the ten per cent.

Sometimes Maxie and the Dwarfs stayed in a hotel, sometimes in digs, but always together. In Birmingham they had wonderful rooms out at Edgbaston. We went back to a fantastic supper with everybody sitting in front of his favorite dish. The Dwarfs traveled with their own cushions which made us all level at the table. I used to think at times that Spiro seemed bigger than me. The Turk was particularly pleased that night for Maxie had found him some rose petal jam to go with his yogurt. He ate it with enormous relish, till Spiro slapped his elbows off the table. Then he cried. Maxie took the Turk onto his knee, wiped the round black eyes with his own blue silk handkerchief, and to cheer him up coaxed a song out of the melancholy Dwarf.

The Turk climbed to the top of a bookcase and sang Maxie's lewd French number. I listened to the sweet, high treble voice and mused upon the cruelty of the Eastern races.

When Maxie was sure that the Turk was happy again, we played poker. The stakes were astronomical and the losses paid with I.O.U.'s, which were meticulously carried forward to the next game. Inside that tight little circle, Maxie and the Dwarfs had their own fiscal system. The real money was admirably looked after by Spiro. Their agreed intention was to retire one day to an orange farm in the South.

According to my calculations they could have bought three of those dream farms already, but I never went for that vision of the future. I knew that Maxie and the Dwarfs would go on trouping till the thea-

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tre fell in and the Big Top mouldered into dust. And that meant forever.

My plan was to catch the midnight to London, but as usual I went on the early morning train at six o'clock.

Maxie sent me upstairs to wash Spiro's cigar smoke out of my hair and I came down to find him waiting for me in the hall, looking as fresh as if he had just awakened from eight hours of solid sleep.

When he put his arm round my shoulders and said, "Your props are in the car," I felt the warmth of his smile enwrap me like a mantle.

As we slipped through the front door, the first light of morning was breaking over the smoke-scarred Birmingham suburb. Outside the gate the Body jumped up and down behind Spiro, calling to Maxie and each other in half a dozen different lingos.

Spiro spoke my name, and I heard him say above the babel, "Look, a new act for you. The tallest man in the world."

I did as the Dwarf bade me, and looking over the stunted privet hedge saw my coat hanging on a lamppost, its arms stuck through the crossbar and my hat crowning the top of the lamp. In front of the light was a roughly cut mask through which the still-burning bulbs marked the eyes and mouth.

I turned sharply to Maxie, who leaned against the door laughing, intending to say, "This is beyond a joke"; but he took off his own big camel's-hair coat and wrapped it warmly round me, saying, "Send it to me in a parcel—you'll miss another train if we stay to pull down the tallest man in the world." All my anger at the fate of my own brand-new coat evaporated.

In the car I settled myself beside Maxie, while Spiro and the Body climbed in behind us. Through the rear window I saw a diffident morning breeze gently stir the tails of my coat as the tallest man in the world leered after us. We were off to a great accompaniment, for the noise we had made woke every barking dog in the neighborhood.

I made the train as it moved out of the platform. For a while Maxie and the Dwarfs kept pace with my carriage. They pranced round his legs waving their farewells, and I saw that Maxie was enormously delighted with the antics of his children.

I meant to pick Maxie up in a month's time at Nottingham, but this time the week came and went and I could not get away. The few months before Christmas are always a busy time for me and that year I was having one hell of a job persuading my new comedy find to do a new routine.

About nine weeks went by before I saw Maxie again and during the whole time I never gave a thought to Del Roy.

The town was Liverpool. Maxie and the Dwarfs were ready at the

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airport with their usual boisterous welcome. I shook hands with the Body, pulled the ear of one, tweeked the nose of another, and bowed gravely to Spiro. I thought for a moment, before we all piled into the Rolls, that his myopic eyes behind the horn-rimmed spectacles seemed unusually preoccupied.

As Maxie swung the Rolls out of the airport, he looked at me affectionately and said unnecessarily, "You're in front tonight, of course."

"Yes—but there's an act I want to pick up at the Shakespeare first. But I'll be in for the second show."

"Well, don't run away afterwards. I've got a big surprise for you."

Maxie was smiling as he began to sing his song, but I was conscious at once that something was wrong, out of place. Then I got it. He was singing alone. The Dwarfs were silent.

We all lunched together at the Adelphi Hotel. There was plenty to talk about. I had booked the act with Papa Gaudin in Paris for Christmas and had started negotiations for a European tour in the spring. I was only mildly surprised when Maxie told me not to rush into anything.

"You never know what's going to turn up," he said, grinning across the table.

I saw Spiro watching him and a maggot of worry began to stir in my mind. Every now and then Maxie looked past us like a man searching for a familiar face. Suddenly he stood up and waved. I looked round. I was curious. Del Roy had come into the restaurant and was sitting alone at a table beneath the tall window. When I turned back, Spiro was looking at me. I raised my brows, but the Dwarf's expression remained blank and uninformative.

The hairs on the back of my neck began to tingle. Those hairs act like an alarm bell to me.

I was not surprised when Del Roy joined us for coffee, but I was astonished when Spiro rose at once, said he had a lot of reading to do, and left. The Body, of course, got up and followed him.

As I watched the Dwarfs file out of the restaurant, I put my hand to the back of my neck. The alarm bell was working overtime.

"I must talk to Maxie," I noted anxiously. "Those Dwarfs need coddling. And quick."

I looked at him. Maxie's whole attention was riveted on Del Roy. I suppose my interest must have penetrated for he raised his head and invited me to drive to Chester. He accepted my answer without argument when I said I had a lot of sleep to catch up with, and they went for their drive without me.

As the Rolls spun away from the hotel, I heard Maxie's laugh cleanse the petrol-laden air, and saw the sudden flash of his blue silk handkerchief as he remembered me and waved goodbye.

Then I looked for Spiro.

He was not in the hotel. I went

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down to the theatre. The dressing rooms were in darkness. I gathered my thoughts together and remembered all that reading he had to do. I knew at once where I would find Spiro.

When I reached the Public Library he was not there, but I did not anticipate a long wait. Spiro had said he wanted to read. I was sure the little man would appear.

Soon I saw his hat just above the counter and heard the librarian's friendly greeting. Spiro had been coming to these places for years and knew everybody by their Christian names. When he made his way towards the shelves marked *Biography,* I fell into step beside him. He did not look surprised to see me.

"What goes on?" I asked.

He put up his hand and took down a copy of the *Life of Napoleon.*

"The Corsican was five-foot-two," I said. "I'll tell you before you tell me."

Spiro smiled.

"I wish you liked me," he said. "I'm very attached to you."

For a moment I felt sorry for the agile mind imprisoned in the Dwarf's body. Then he laughed and the smell of garlic was suddenly strong. My old dislike enveloped me, and I spoke brusquely. "When did Maxie fall for Del Roy? What happened?"

The little man began to talk.

At first his voice was quiet and controlled, but by the time he came to the end of his account the Dwarf was sweating with anger and the smell of garlic was lost in the smell of Spiro.

The first night in Birmingham, Spiro related how he watched the whole bill through and got Maxie down to the wings to see Del Roy at the start of the second show. Maxie agreed with him that it was a trite little act and not up to their standard. He asked Spiro to bring Del Roy to his dressing room. But it was Spiro, sitting on the make-up bench, who spoke for Maxie.

"Your act is not good enough," Spiro said. "We are dropping you tonight. You will be paid as long as the tour lasts."

"You'd have to do that," I thought. "Del Roy's contract is as watertight as yours"—then kicked myself for thinking like an agent. What was Del Roy to me?

Apparently Del Roy had broken down and cried. Spiro said contemptuously that she looked as if she had been standing in the rain.

I knew exactly what he meant. The thin, pretty-faced girl would have stood drooping in front of Maxie with her tatty Japanese kimono swinging open to reveal arms and legs like peach sticks. I envisaged her using every bit of waif appeal she had, straightening her child's shoulders as she looked bravely up at him to ask what she could do to make her act good enough to remain on the bill.

"I showed her the door," Spiro

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said. "I knew what was coming next. There was a stray dog in Madrid, a barefoot boy in Rome, *etcetera, etcetera.*"

He shrugged wearily, took off his glasses, wiped them, and went on plaintively. "Almost every capital in Europe has a similar memory and some are not easy to clear up."

"What happened to the Golden Hamsters?" I asked.

"I found a home for them."

"Pity you couldn't have found a home for Del Roy."

Anger showed violently behind Spiro's thick glasses and I went on quickly, "What happened next?"

Spiro's narrative showed me vividly the picture of Del Roy's fragile figure hurrying along the corridor and up the stone dressing-room stairs to the fly floor, with Maxie watching in the open doorway behind her.

When he came back in, Maxie was pensive. Taking up a towel he had quickly rubbed his smooth brown flesh till it shone.

"We were too rough, Spiro," he had said. "That little girl needs help."

I groaned.

Spiro stood with his back against the books and sighed.

From Birmingham they had gone to Manchester. Although her part of the act was out, Del Roy traveled with the Company. She told the Stage Manager, a sentimental impressionable guy, that she guessed she would stick around with the Crowd. She hadn't got a home, she couldn't play any other dates the way her contract was, and her rooms were booked everywhere, so what the hell else was she to do? The Stage Manager found the opportunity to tell Maxie that he was sorry for the kid and asked if it was okay for Del Roy to use the stage sometimes to keep in practice.

I looked at Spiro and realized that he had suddenly become excited. His small, fat hands were trembling and I thought I saw saliva on his pale red lips.

"Now, as you know," he said, his voice curiously high, "it's an understood thing that we have the stage every morning from eleven thirty on."

I nodded. I knew Maxie's rule.

Spiro became very heated. "Well, when we came on the stage next day, Del Roy's trapeze was up and she was swinging from the bar. I was going to stop her, but Maxie held my arm."

The image of Maxie was clear to me; he was standing on the side of the stage in his rehearsal kit. Tight black gabardine trousers, nothing above, and Spiro beside him reaching only as high as his waistline.

The Dwarf said Del Roy pointed to the stage clock. The hands were at eleven. The stage carpenter came through the pass door.

"Who's been mucking this clock around," he grumbled and put the hands forward to eleven thirty.

"Del Roy, of course," I said.

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Spiro spat.

Every morning after that, Del Roy was on the stage when they arrived. Directly she saw Maxie, she would call the Props and begin to clear her trapeze. I knew without asking that she had persistently ignored the Dwarfs. Then one morning she fell from her top bar. Spiro said the girl was a hell of a way up and would surely have broken her back if Maxie had not been there to catch her. She begged for time to climb again; said it was the only way that she could regain her nerve.

Maxie lifted her to the rope and Del Roy swarmed rapidly up to swing herself into a sitting position on the top bar. Spiro said she looked like a skinny kid in her small silk briefs and vest.

Del Roy swung herself through a few simple exercises then called suddenly, "Catch!"

Maxie looked up.

That time she fell deliberately and the Dwarfs saw him laugh before he caught and tossed her in the air like a ball. Then he lowered her gently to the stage.

Spiro stopped talking, took out his fine linen handkerchief with its elaborate monogram, and wiped his hands.

"There have been women before," I said, trying to comfort him.

"Not in the act," he answered.

I knew what Spiro meant.

"Now they rehearse every day," he said bitterly.

I was jerked into fresh attention —the Dwarf's voice was nearly a snarl.

"With what result?"

"We shall know tonight," he said crisply. "Maxie is going to show us all."

I whistled. I knew, if Maxie was ready for an exhibition, there must be something to see.

A librarian approached and told me to put out my cigarette. I stared at the fair young girl. I did not even know I had lit it. Spiro was very upset. He said that they liked people to observe the rules in places like the Public Library and added that he was so easily remembered because of his size. I felt that I had let him down and apologized.

"I'll wait for you outside," I said. "I want to smoke." I also wanted to get away from Spiro's smell.

The Dwarf came and stood on the broad top step outside the Public Library. I was two steps lower so that our faces were level. He passed me his morocco-leather cigar case and I helped myself. We lit the cigars slowly. Correctly. Spiro had a fine taste in cigars—they were worth the attention. When the Dwarf's cigar was well alight, he took it out of his mouth and slowly savored the smoke.

"We have a good act," he said mildly. "We should not be happy if anything disturbed it."

Spiro then smiled grimly and went off.

I watched the little man cross

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the square that marks Liverpool's civic center to pass the near-black Ionic-pillared Town Hall, until he was lost in the crowds outside the Empire Theatre. Above his head I saw the week's bill and read the boldly printed words: *Maxie and the Dwarfs*. The title looked very permanent.

I walked towards the Mersey. Perhaps the wind on the top deck of the New Brighton ferry boat would blow the odor of Spiro out of my nostrils. I did not want to think about him any more or make conjectures on the punishment he would decide to mete out to Del Roy.

Standing by the top rail of the ferry boat I looked across the water and pretended that I was fascinated by the traffic of the gray-green Mersey. I watched the forest of striped funnels staring over the tops of the bond sheds lining the docks, the tugs snorting indignantly at the head of their charges, the clean bright paint of the Isle of Man steamer gleaming in the winter sun, and the dark, dirty hulk of a merchantman slowly steaming to sea. The ferry boat cut across the merchantman's wake and written clearly in yellow letters along the ship's stern I read the name, *Neseta, Barcelona.*

The image of many different colored rats racing across a hotel bedroom in Barcelona filled my mind. I stood quite still and allowed the memory to grow.

Three years before, Maxie and the Dwarfs had made a short spring tour of the main Spanish towns. From Barcelona I received a letter written by a friend of mine who was on the bill, tipping me off that Sam Ellerman, the European end of a big American Film Agency, had been talking to Spiro. My friend did not know the outcome of their talks. On the principle that what is mine should remain mine, I flew to Barcelona.

The city was empty of Sam. There was a wild rumor around the bars that he had been chased out of his hotel by a plague of rainbow-colored rats—rats that somehow showed themselves only to Sam. I knew Ellerman well. He suffered from our occupational disease—ulcers. This meant that he was permanently on the wagon. I had an idea those rats were real.

I could not persuade Spiro to talk, although I stayed in Barcelona until the end of the week, when the Spanish tour was finished and we all took the train to Paris.

At the frontier the French people made a big business of looking through the luggage. I happened to be next to Spiro and as they searched his cases I saw several tins of luminous paint. I picked up one of them.

"Phosphorescent bills could be very effective," Spiro said blandly.

I put down the paint.

I had some chocolate in my pocket. With it, I enticed the thin, pale

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Dwarf into the corridor of the train. He told me in French, a language that is almost my own, that Sam had made an offer for the Dwarfs to go to the coast—that means Hollywood in our parlance—to make a series of comedy two-reelers at top pay. It was a long-term contract which did not include Maxie. Spiro had turned it down flat. I asked if Maxie knew why Sam had been in Barcelona, and the thin, pale Dwarf smiled before he shook his head. I thought the smile was very gentle. For a Dwarf.

Sam did not understand loyalty. He just raised the ante. Then Spiro set the rats on him. I asked the pallid little man how it was done and learned that Barcelona was the bearded Spaniard's home town and he had hordes of relatives, among them an uncle in the rat-catching trade.

I could guess the rest. The Dwarf ate the chocolate, licked his fingers, and went back to the compartment. He was a dirty eater and I was not surprised when Spiro brought him along immediately to the washroom, shaking his head reprovingly at me as they rocked past . . .

I turned on the deck of the ferry boat and put my face to the wind. Somehow I thought that it would take more than a troupe of colored rats to frighten Del Roy. Years of experience had taught me that the small slight ones you meet in show business are the toughest.

I got back to the Liverpool side in time to catch the act at the Shakespeare and leave quickly, hoping that the two fellows whose fooling was not good enough would never hear that I had been in front.

I walked round to the Empire and met the first show coming out. As I went through the stage door, Del Roy passed me.

Maxie was in his dressing room. The towel was extra busy and his golden brown skin shone like satin.

"Anything good at the Shakespeare?" he asked.

I shrugged my disappointment.

"Cheer up," he smiled, "perhaps the next time you put your hand in the hat, you'll bring out the right number."

From the top of Maxie's wardrobe trunk the theatre cat demanded his attention and with cunning understanding he stroked behind her ears. The cat purred and rubbed her head against his hand. Maxie was delighted.

"Take care," I said. "She can scratch as well as purr."

But Maxie shook his head. "They never scratch me," he laughed.

I fortified myself in the bar for the rest of the evening and went to the back of the circle to see Maxie close the bill, with the alarm bell at the back of my neck well-drowned in good Scotch whiskey.

When the last satisfied customer left the house, I made my way down to the empty stalls and saw that Maxie meant to do the thing in style. He had kept the full orchestra, the stage staff—the works.

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Spiro and the Body filed into the second row of the stalls and I sat down about halfway back. I was irritated when the theatre manager and his wife came to sit just behind me. A nice woman but she had been a performer herself and would lean forward to reminisce.

The conductor came into the pit, raised his baton, and, with the down beat, led the orchestra into a rousing overture. The house lights dimmed and I saw the glow of Spiro's cigar. Soon it became the focal point from which I could not look away.

The curtain rose and I was able to shift my gaze.

Draped in black velvet tabs, the stage was completely blacked out except for a single spot shining on a silver bar twenty feet up. I realized that the borders had been raised as far as they would go and we were seeing a great deal more of the stage than is usually visible.

Maxie made his entrance from center back. Picked up in a pinpoint spot he walked slowly toward the footlights, rolling a silver stick over his shoulders and into his arms. Then he tossed it into the air, caught it on one arm, threw it up again, and caught it on the other. The thing was thick for a stick and gleamed like water in the moonlight.

The drums began to roll and a shaft of light shot across the stage. Maxie started to twirl round and round, holding the silver stick straight out from his body at arm's length. Each time the stick came into the shaft of light it flashed. Suddenly he released his hold and the stick shot across the stage, up the beam of light, and abruptly stopped as if it was suspended in mid-air. Then slowly it began to rise, twisting like a corkscrew, going higher and higher till it was level with the bar twenty feet up. Almost at once the stick was upright on the bar. The lights were clever—Del Roy must have put out her hands to catch the rope, but I never saw her move. It got me. I was impressed.

I saw the human silver stick shimmering on the bar and Maxie below on the stage. As he moved into the beam of light he was smiling. His golden hair shone. The human stick wavered on the bar, then balanced again. I looked up and down. Then up again. The drums stopped. Light poured suddenly from everywhere onto the silver stick.

"She's going to jump," I gasped, and did not know that I had spoken.

"She can't," said the manager's wife behind me. "There's no net."

The words were no sooner spoken than she screamed, for the silver stick had fallen from the bar and, falling, turned over and over.

Maxie was still smiling as he put out his arms and with no apparent effort caught the stick, twirled it round his shoulders, across and round again.

He was laughing when he

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brought the silver stick forward and bowed over it.

The orchestra went into a long chord and the curtains fell. I swear that all through the performance Del Roy never moved a limb. She *was* the silver stick.

Maxie came through the tabs and took the call. He had his hand on top of the stick as if he was leaning on it, then suddenly took his hand away. Del Roy dropped her arms, moved her legs, and was suddenly alive. They bowed to us and to each other as if the house was packed.

I stood up and shouted, 'Well done!" Then I saw the glow of Spiro's cigar and knew that he was looking straight at me. I shrugged. How was I to know that Del Roy had so much to sell? Maxie and the Dwarfs had seemed the tops. Till then.

Maxie was waiting for me on the stage. I noted that even the stage cloth was made of black velvet and the rope up which Del Roy had twisted, of black woven silk. The girl was trying to scratch between her shoulder blades, but without effect since her hands were covered with black velvet gloves. Maxie turned her round and with obvious familiarity scratched for her. I knew then she was his mistress.

As I stood beside them, I saw that Del Roy's boyish figure was sheathed in fine black velvet, with a wide ribbon of silver sequins running down the center front and back. On her head she wore a spun-glass silver wig. Even standing so close to her and with the harsh light shining above our heads, she bewitched me. I still saw her as the silver stick.

I could see that Maxie was bursting for my approbation. More than all the paying customers in the world he wanted me, his ten-per-center, to say the act was good.

I told Maxie the truth. The act was unique.

As I finished, I smelled garlic and turned to face Spiro with the Body in a row behind him. On behalf of the Dwarfs he offered formal congratulations. Maxie shook hands with all his children, then presented them formally to Del Roy. Spiro bowed and the thin, pretty girl smiled.

As she rubbed her head lightly against Maxie's arm, I thought of the theatre cat. When I heard her say, "If they come up one by one, I'll give all the mannikins a kiss," I looked at her hands to see if the claws were out. Pulling herself tight against Maxie, she added, "It will make each one feel a man for once."

Spiro stiffened and the bell at the back of my neck burst into a noisy carillon.

"We have no need of that act of civility," he said, bowed again, and led the Body off the stage.

Del Roy was quite sure of Maxie; but I saw that he looked troubled and seemed about to reprove her. Then the conductor and the theatre

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manager's wife interrupted with their effusive congratulations and the moment was lost.

I spoke on the telephone early next morning to London, with the result that Maxie and the Silver Stick were in the bill that very night. They closed the first half, leaving Maxie and the Dwarfs their usual spot.

I was certain that the customers would love the new act, but I must admit I was not quite prepared for the overwhelming reception it got. When the curtains fell on the broad Empire proscenium, there was absolute silence—as if the breath had been knocked right out of their bellies. Then it broke. Round after round of applause, backed by whistles, shouts, the stamping of feet, and here and there a program thrown into the air.

Maxie and the Silver Stick were not just a smash. They were a riot.

I think it was the emanation of sex that did it. The act was packed with the desire they felt for each other and their fulfilment of it. I knew that a gold mine was in my grasp, still I never thought of putting Del Roy under contract. We are an old-fashioned firm. My father always believed that a handshake was more binding than a dozen signatures on a management contract and during the twenty years that I have run the business since my father's retirement, I have never once regretted the old man's ruling.

I stayed with Maxie for a couple more days, then had to hurry over to Leeds before returning to London. When I did get back to my office, the offers had begun to roll in, and I was surprised at what a popular fellow I had become. It looked as if I would not need to buy a lunch for myself for months to come.

I decided to let things ride. There was no hurry. Maxie was booked with the Dwarfs in Paris for Christmas with Papa Gaudin. While he was there I would sift the offers and take the best for the New Year.

I had only been back in London ten days when Spiro called me from Edinburgh. The time was three o'clock in the morning. I knew who it was because the charges were reversed. I started to tell him that I had been watching a new Hungarian girl I had brought over, not bad —when Spiro interrupted urgently.

I listened to two sentences and knew I must catch the first train.

Arriving in Edinburgh at about five o'clock on the afternoon of the following day, I saw Spiro on the platform. He loked pale and by the time we reached the Caledonian Hotel I felt pale.

The first person we saw as we entered the foyer was Sam Ellerman.

"Hello there," he called.

I greeted him politely but did not stay to talk. Spiro and I had a lot of conferring to do and I was anxious to get upstairs where we could do it in peace.

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I let the Dwarf talk without a break. This time he had me so worried I did not even smell the garlic.

Sam had come into town the previous afternoon and had made an offer between shows. I waited for Spiro to tell me the gist of it. Sam wanted Maxie to do a coast to coast tour in America, starting immediately and ending at the New York Palace. Del Roy, determined to go, was urging Maxie to break his Christmas contract with Papa Gaudin.

I looked at Spiro and raised my brows questioningly.

"The offer does not include us," he said quietly.

I felt cold. I knew the Silver Stick was good, but had never visualized Maxie without the Dwarfs. To me it would be like dropping half of himself if he went to the States and left them behind.

I said, "But Papa Gaudin. Maxie can't let him down."

"It is the woman," Spiro shrugged. "He is bemused."

I knew then that I should have forgotten my father's principles and put them all under contract.

"I'll talk to Maxie," I said.

"Not till after the second show," Spiro ordered. "Maxie is always very nervous with the Stick. She is temperamental."

I believed him. I knew how tricky those skinny little tramps could be once they'd felt the first feather of success.

I saw Maxie at supper. The Dwarfs and Del Roy were all at the table with him.

Sam joined us. I was not sure why till he said, "I'm looking after this little lady's interests from now on." Then he patted Del Roy's knee, and added, "Of course, Maxie's still your boy."

When I looked at Maxie he flushed and stared over the waiter's head.

We got down to brass tacks quickly. I found that Del Roy had only succeeded in part. Maxie was determined to play Paris at Christmas for Papa Gaudin, but had agreed to go to the States afterward. He beamed suddenly as if he had thought of something pleasant, looked at the Dwarfs, and announced that it would be a wonderful holiday for them; then he added that they would be paid just the same as if they were still performing.

The big simpleton was so pleased and happy that I was sure he had no idea of the enormity of the insult he was heaping upon the Dwarfs. Nor had he realized what kind of a payoff it was for Del Roy. But the woman remembered. I could almost hear her purr, "Tit for tat, Mannikins." I looked at her as she sat still and smiling, and knew that she had engineered the whole deal.

"We are not willing for the act to be split up," Spiro said softly.

The ten eyes of the Body watched and waited. They did not understand the language that was being

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spoken, but Dwarfs are very susceptible to atmosphere and they knew that the air was full of dissension.

Sam moved impatiently in his seat and Maxie leaned across the table to speak to Spiro.

"But I want to give you a holiday," he said earnestly. "You all deserve it. Afterwards we will be together again."

The Turk, who had been watching intently, suddenly asked a question in his shrill high voice. Spiro answered in a whisper and the Turk burst into tears as he sobbed out the answer to the other Dwarfs and pointed one of his pudgy fingers at Del Roy.

She looked at the Turk and laughed derisively.

The bearded Spaniard picked up a pitcher of water and flung it hard into Del Roy's face.

Spiro swept the Body out of the restaurant immediately. The Turk was still weeping and the others clustered round him, all trying to touch him. I thought it was because they wanted to comfort him.

Maxie, bewildered and distressed, looked after the Dwarfs and allowed Sam to help Del Roy dry herself.

I just sat and listened to my alarm bell. Then I heard Maxie voicing excuses for the Dwarfs in the manner of an indulgent father.

Del Roy did not say a word.

We had attracted too much attention to remain in the restaurant, so Maxie and I followed Sam, who took Del Roy upstairs. At the top of the stairs she turned and faced us, a few steps below her. When she finally spoke, her voice was very clear.

The issue was a simple one.

From that moment on it was either she or the Dwarfs.

She turned and went into a room a little way down the corridor. I heard the key click in the lock as she shut Maxie out.

He followed to the top of the stairs, then took a large bowl of flowers from a table and smashed it hard upon the floor. Afterward he strode down the wide sweep of stairs and out of the hotel. For the first time since the bearded Spaniard threw the water in Del Roy's face I saw that Maxie looked intensely angry.

As I turned to run after Maxie, I heard a movement and looked up to see the Dwarfs. All six of them. They were standing in a row on the landing above, peering through the balustrade. The Turk was still sniveling.

I raised my hands, then dropped them helplessly. Spiro copied the gesture and I felt a sudden camaraderie between myself and him.

"We shall keep the act together," he said softly. I knew he meant to comfort me.

Spiro led the Body up some more stairs and out of sight. I heard the Turk's high thin voice wailing, then that too died away.

I shrugged and went to find Maxie.

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Walking the hard old streets of Edinburgh, I felt cobblestones under my feet and steps and tram lines, and all the time I was conscious of the dark hump of the Castle brooding over me.

I never found Maxie.

Returning wearily to the hotel I observed that all the lights were out except for the half-lit chandelier above the hall. Passing slowly through the shadows I climbed the stairs to my room.

Spiro was sitting on my bed.

"Heck," I thought, "haven't I earned my ten per cent tonight?"

"You can sleep now," he said. "I've fixed it. I found a solution."

The Dwarf loked very tired. I picked him up and stood him on the floor. He blinked at me from behind misty glasses, seemed about to say something more, then shook his head and went away.

I knew why Spiro was sad; he was a realist; he understood that the Dwarfs had to give up Maxie.

In spite of the little man's reassurances, sleep avoided me.

I went to Maxie's room once or twice but he had not returned. I passed Del Roy's room and saw that her door was slightly open. I guessed that she had left it that way to let Maxie know he was forgiven.

I finally gave up the idea of sleep and lay waiting for the dawn . . .

By the time I reached the lamppost, Maxie was tearing down the tallest man in the world. The woman's head wobbled on her shoulders and the black silk rope dangled from her neck.

Maxie was weeping.

He turned and moved with even steps along deserted Princes Street, carrying Del Roy's body carefully in his arms. I kept up with his long strides, but Maxie did not look at me or speak.

At the police station above Waverley he stopped and went in. I followed.

It was not until I sat quietly with Sam much, much later that I was able to put things in their proper order. Sam helped me to talk. Without his kindness I should have gone crazy.

When I had followed Maxie along Edinburgh's famous street I was sure he was crying for the Silver Stick; but it was not so—Maxie's tears were for his children.

He stood in front of the desk in the police station and said quietly, "I did it. I killed her." Then like a temple offering he laid the body before the astonished police sergeant.

Del Roy looked thinner and smaller in death than she ever had in life.

Two policemen came and took Maxie away. They were sure he was mad.

I begged them not to let him speak to anyone until I had found a lawyer; then I went straight back to Spiro.

The Dwarf was asleep. I shook him and woke him and told him what had happened.

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He sat up, listened, and gave me instructions. I obeyed at once, pulling the telephone toward me.

While I was locating the best lawyer in Edinburgh, Spiro dressed and went out of the room.

I arranged to meet the lawyer at the police station above Waverley, put down the receiver, and turned.

The Dwarfs were standing in a row before me. The were all washed and dressed, with their pigskin gloves on their hands, their buckskin shoes on their feet, and their camel's-hair coats tightly belted.

Spiro was pale and his skin glistened.

"They did it," he said, "I shall take them down to the police station and we shall confess."

I looked from one small face to the other. When I came to the Turk he pouted and looked at his feet. I stood up and led them out of the hotel. They followed me like a crocodile of obedient children.

The Dwarfs confessed. They confessed in every conceivable language.

The police checked their story. At one point it looked as if it would hold up. Till the night waiter at the hotel remembered seeing Spiro leave my room at the exact time the M.O. set for Del Roy's death. She was still warm when he examined the body and he was able to place the time within ten minutes.

That ruled out Spiro. And nobody believed the Body could have acted without its Head.

A policeman on his beat saw Maxie outside the stage door of the theatre, gazing fixedly at the bill, three-quarters of an hour before Del Roy was hanged. They found the broken bowl outside her door, his blue silk handkerchief on the floor of her room, his fingerprints on the locket that hung round her neck; so fact after fact began to lend substance to Maxie's repeated statement that he alone was responsible for Del Roy's death.

I begged the lawyer to arrange for Spiro and me to see him.

Maxie was gentle, friendly, and peaceful—but we could not move him. Spiro pleaded and argued, got down on his pudgy knees; but Maxie only lifted him up and stood him on the table so that their faces were level, then reminded Spiro of his duty to the Body.

"Go back, my friend," he said, his big hand resting gently on Spiro's shoulder. "See that my children are safe. Do not desert them as I did. Remember, they break what they do not understand. Their crime is my sin—I forsook them."

They made us leave and I took Spiro back to the hotel.

He collapsed. I held him in my arms and forgot he was a dwarf.

I listened as he sobbed out his story of the night's happenings.

Spiro said that when he took the Dwarfs upstairs, he told them that they must let Maxie go without a struggle. He explained to the Body that it would only be for a little

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while. Maxie would grow tired of the woman—just as he had of the lame dog in Madrid, the barefoot boy in Rome, and the Golden Hamsters in Birmingham. Then Maxie would come back to them and all would be as it was before.

Spiro was right, of course. Maxie would have come back eventually to his children.

Spiro said over and over again that the Body had agreed with him; otherwise he would not have left them.

"The Turk as well?" I asked.

Then Spiro beat his head with his two small fists. He had overlooked the Turk who was the most destructive child of all.

I imagined how the Turk would have chattered as he led the others to the theatre to drag down the woman's rope, then back to the hotel and up to her room and to put it round her neck and pull it tight.

Spiro described how they carried Del Roy down the fire escape and made a ladder of their own bodies round the lamppost, how they pulled her up to become the tallest man in the world.

Maxie had the best lawyer that Spiro could retain. I hired a leading psychiatrist who fought a two-day battle with the prosecutor and won.

Maxie went to Broadmoor.

Once a year I see him and we talk about the orange farm where the Dwarfs are waiting.

When they let Maxie out, I shall take him South. I hope he will be in time. Dwarfs do not make old bones.

I am sure of Spiro. His love will keep him alive.

I spent two weeks with them last year. I no longer feel any repugnance for the Dwarfs. They are heart-broken children and Spiro is my friend.

NEXT MONTH . . .

HELEN McCLOY
MANLY WADE WELLMAN
RAY CHESSON

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DION HENDERSON**

TITLE: ***First Man at the Funeral***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: The local Sheriff

LOCALE: Andrew Jackson County

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An outdoors story as fresh as morning dew. The Sheriff, you will find, knew his quails, his hunting dogs, his guns—and his murders.*

WE WERE UP IN THE ERICKSON north forty with my old dog and the Sheriff had just missed the prettiest double on quail you ever saw when the jailer came panting and wheezing through the sedge.

"Sheriff," he hollered. "There's been a death."

"Not here there ain't, dang it," the Sheriff said, blowing smoke out of the barrels of his double gun. "I shot under the left bird and I was a mile behind the right one."

"No, no," the jailer hollered, even though he was right close to us by then. "I mean there's a man dead."

The Sheriff looked relieved.

"Well," he said. "The way I'm shooting today, I'm better off back in town hunting criminals."

"Hold on a minute," the jailer was getting red in the face again, not from running this time. "I'm trying to tell you there ain't any criminals. It's just that old man Pembroke got flung from his horse and killed."

The Sheriff took off his hat.

"There goes the last man in Andrew Jackson County," he said reverently, "to own a good singles dog."

"Amen," the jailer said. "Doc thought you'd want to know right away."

Being the game warden and something of a bird dog man myself, I had figured out by this time what they were talking about. There used to be a saying that you take a bird dog that was certain sure on hunting coveys of quail, and you catch

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his owner on the verge of starvation, you might buy that dog for money. But you take a dog that could mark down and find the scattered singles from a wild flushed covey, and the way you got that dog was to be first man at his owner's funeral. Even then, the saying went, you might have to take on the support of seven minor children to get the dog away from the widow.

The Sheriff was safe enough there. Old man Pembroke didn't have any widow, and no children. No anything, except a nephew who'd come down lately from the city. And that singles dog, of course. There hadn't been much chance of anybody getting that dog before, because rich as he was, old man Pembroke would've been the last man in Jackson County to starve if famine hit.

"Let's get back to town," the Sheriff said.

We drove on in and stopped at Doc's furniture store, which he was running when he wasn't occupied with the undertaking business. Being the only undertaker around, Doc was the county coroner too, naturally.

"Poor feller," Doc said, meaning old man Pembroke. "Probably put his horse over that log a hundred times. Probably got flung off twenty times out of the hundred, the way he rode. But this time he landed square on a rock and bashed in his head."

"Right sad," the Sheriff said. "You reckon I ought to go up and investigate, it being a violent death and all?"

"I reckoned you would," Doc said, a mite tartly, "or I wouldn't have been in such an all-fired hurry to tell you about it."

"Well," the Sheriff said. "It being about supper time now, and out of consideration for the feelings of the bereaved, I'll wait until tomorrow."

"If that nephew ain't any more bereaved than he sounded when he called me," Doc said, "there ain't a whole lot to consider."

"How'd he sound?"

"Rich," Doc said. "How the heck do you think a man'd sound, his only relative setting about to die and leaving a million dollars, thereabouts, to you?"

"I'll get over there in a day or so," the Sheriff said.

"Young Pembroke sounded to me," Doc said, "like a man who didn't know a singles dog from a single tree, and what's more didn't aim to learn."

"Tomorrow," the Sheriff said firmly. "First thing. You want to come along," he said to me, "in your official capacity as game warden?"

"Sure," I said. "Seeing as how you've been hunting birds over my dogs for the last eight, ten years, I got quite an interest in seeing you get a dog of your own."

We let it go at that. But next morning the Sheriff stopped for me and we went on up to the Pembroke place. The farmstead, where the tenant who cropped the place lived with

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his family, was right close to the road. Then you took the drive that wound up into the piney woods along the sedge fields and the buckwheat patches that old man Pembroke kept just for a shooting preserve. And presently you came to the old mansion, kind of tumbled down, and the stable for the riding horses, and the kennels. The tenant's wife came up and gave the house a lick and a promise a couple of times a week, but old man Pembroke took care of the dogs himself.

Young Pembroke came out to meet us. There was another fellow, the one who came down from the city with him, kind of hanging around in the background. In my calling, you get to make pretty fast judgments, and I wouldn't have trusted either one of them up a tree, especially up the same tree.

The Sheriff was talking about how it was all too bad, and young Pembroke said it certainly was, he felt real depressed, especially because he didn't get to spend much time with his poor old uncle.

Out in the kennels the dogs heard us and started up a ruckus and I walked back there. The Sheriff and young Pembroke followed along. I noticed all the water dishes were empty and when I could get a word in between them two soft-soaping one another, I asked whether the dogs had been fed.

Young Pembroke looked kind of startled and said he didn't know much about dogs, he'd forgotten all about it. So the Sheriff and I went to work, and I tell you a yardful of dogs can get middling hungry in a couple of days.

We got to a run where a big white and lemon pointer was, and the Sheriff whispered to me, "This one's him, ain't it?"

I looked at that dog, the big smooth moving fellow that still showed in his marking that Lady Ferris and Mr. Fishel's dog were away back there in his pedigree, and I said, "It sure is."

Young Pembroke came up and the big white and lemon dog bristled and then he did something that made me think I'd lost my hearing. He showed his teeth at young Pembroke and backed up and opened his mouth like he was going to beller, but it came out like this:

"——"

Just nothing—a bark that didn't make any noise at all.

Young Pembroke backed up a little, and the dog went:

"——, ——"

The Sheriff stood there with a funny expression on his face.

"Say," he said. "Ain't that the dog your uncle used to keep in the house?"

"Not that I know of," young Pembroke said. "He's been out here with the others for the few weeks I've been visiting."

"That's funny," the Sheriff said. He scratched his head. We finished the dogs, then the Sheriff said to young Pembroke:

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"Mind if we look over the scene where your uncle was killed? Just routine, but I got to make out a report."

"Not at all," young Pembroke said. "I'll show you. But if you don't mind, I'd rather not go down there. You know how it is."

"I reckon," the Sheriff said. "Say, before we do that, I wonder if I could talk to you about buying this here dog. That's what I really came for, to be honest with you."

Young Pembroke looked at him and then laughed. The other fellow showed up from somewhere and he laughed too.

"Shucks, Sheriff," young Pembroke said. "You can have him, to recollect my uncle by, if you want. You can have all the dogs. I don't know much about dogs."

"Yuh," the Sheriff said. "Well, that's settled. Now, me and the game warden will just mosey on over to the scene of the dyin'."

The log jump was just a little ways past the stables, the path showing it was a favorite ride for the old man. The jump was right at the edge of the woods and on the far side of it there was a low place gouged out from all the horses landing there through the years. It was partly churned up from hooves and partly in grass. There was no mistaking the rock that killed the old man, either. It was off to one side and there still was blood on it. The Sheriff turned it over with his toe, but only some grass was under it.

"I reckon that's enough," the Sheriff said. He looked kind of serious, so we didn't talk much on the way back. He opened the kennel run and the big white and lemon dog came out, tail wagging a little. The Sheriff snapped a leash on him and we walked around to the front of the house. Young Pembroke and the other fellow were standing there beside their car. They came to meet us. When they were about twenty feet off, the white and lemon dog kind of bunched himself and opened his mouth and said, "——" and jumped straight for young Pembroke.

"That dog doesn't like me," young Pembroke said.

"Doesn't surprise me none," the Sheriff said. "You expect him to be in love with the fellers that beat his master to death?"

Young Pembroke said, "You're kidding, Sheriff."

"Wish I was," the Sheriff said. "Sure wish I was. But when you lied to me about this dog being out in the kennels for a couple weeks, I figured you might have lied about some other things. The rock that killed your uncle, for instance. It wasn't lying there longer'n yesterday —the grass is still green under it. May even be some fingerprints on it. I'll bet you," the Sheriff said, "there won't even be any grass stains on your uncle's clothes, down in Doc's ice box."

Young Pembroke had turned as white as his friend was.

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He said, "How in blazes did you know about the dog?"

"Hoarse," the Sheriff said. "Put a house dog out in a kennel, he'll bark himself hoarse in twenty-four hours. Then for a couple days he won't be able to make a sound, but after that his voice comes back. Only then he don't bark any more because he ain't a house dog no longer, he's a kennel dog. You must have rassled this here dog outside yesterday morning, because he was trying to stave you off the old man."

The two of them started to run, going in opposite directions. The Sheriff took the leash in his left hand and unlimbered his .38. Young Pembroke was going to the left and the Sheriff hit him in the calf of the leg with the first shot. The other fellow went to the right and the Sheriff hit him in the hand with the second shot as he tried to get the keys into the car door. Then the Sheriff flipped open the cylinder of the revolver, blew smoke out of the barrel and looked at me.

"If you game wardens would let a man use a .38 on quail," he said, "I'd be all right, even on them going-away doubles."

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . .

ELLERY QUEEN's	*Miracles Do Happen*
DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS's	*A Matter of Public Notice*
AGATHA CHRISTIE's	*The Servant Problem*
MANLY WADE WELLMAN's	*The Mayor Calls His Family*
PAT STADLEY's	*The Doe and the Gantlet*
RAY CHESSON's	*You Can't Run Away*
HELEN McCLOY's	*Shock Tactics*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LESLIE BIGELOW**

TITLE: ***The Silver Cones***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: The Thumb of God, Arizona

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A sick marriage, an Empty Man—these were Etherege's problems. He found the solution in a lost civilization atop an isolated mesa —in the skeletons of an ancient triangle.*

FROM THE INCANTADO AIR BASE, twenty-five miles away, this helicopter approach to The Thumb of God was insolently easy. It was an impertinence to the memory of Coronado's tough soldiers, who sweated through the desert 300 years ago.

"Well," Major Wilmot said, "there's your romantic hideaway." Like everything he said to Etherege, the remark was rich with sneer. But Etherege gazed down at the looming Thumb and said nothing.

The beat of the rotor slowed; the Major compensated cleverly for an updraft off the baking valley floor. "Well," he insisted, "there's your hermitage. Enjoy it while you can, fellow, because maybe you won't come back. Somehow, I just don't think you'll ever come back."

"Go to hell, Major."

"Cheerfully," Major Wilmot said. The helicopter poised for an instant above the Thumb on an updraft as solid as a pillar. "No," the Major said. "I don't think you'll come back. I really don't. Anyhow, you aren't jackass enough to think I won't see Evelyn while you're gone?"

It was always hard to answer Wilmot civilly. Etherege declined to try, and watched the easy skill of the landing.

Frequently a pilot shocks you because he is scarred so little. He lunches in Paris, refuels in Bombay, dines with an exquisite Eurasian in Singapore; and when he returns his mind has no more texture than before. He is too ordinary to profit by the extraordinary.

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But Major Wilmot was scarred too much. He had flown too far and too fast and his bombs, floating down in delicate arcs, had slain too many tens of thousands.

Such ordeals had emptied the Major. He was a nullified man, a legend counterfeiting life. He was only a show of medals, a souvenir of splendid acts.

One day this effigy of a man would (not quite deliberately) miscalculate a little in the sky; or shoot himself, leaving no letter behind. Meanwhile, superbly tailored, vile and witty, Wilmot had an oblique allure for many women, including Etherege's wife.

The helicopter landed on the pinnacle. While Etherege unloaded, the Major smoked, eying the gear with the indulgence of a teacher enduring the efforts of a hopeless student: an oversized shelter half, seven by four; a down sleeping bag; radio transmitter, telescope, microscope, trench spade, Colt Woodsman —even a Geiger counter; in jars and cans, food ample for a week; and six five-gallon tins of water and two of gasoline.

Finally Etherege said, "Thanks for the lift. Three days from now? Same time?"

"I suppose so," Major Wilmot said. "But what's the difference? You won't come back." With one of his venomous flicks of erudition he said, "Farewell, St. Simon Stylites of Arizona. Dig up the lost civilizations. Tame the prehistoric beasts. Chat with the Abominable Snowman."

Lamely, Etherege said, "Go to hell, Major."

"Roger," the Major smiled, and flew away.

Etherege stood alone upon The Thumb of God.

East of the Enchanted Mountains, this pinnacle rises above nine hundred square miles of gravel-and-mesquite valley, gullied by the Incantado River. With a ridge along one side of the summit resembling a fingernail, it looks like some great thumb signaling to the valley below.

Coronado's men had called it, so the Indians tell, *El Dedo de Dios*—The Thumb of God. The Tewas and Hopis, who refuse to go anywhere near it, call it simply Thumb —*Navimong* or *Maleche*. On little redstone cliffs beside the Enchanted River, pictographs of the Thumb were incised by the Hohokam, the Old Ones, who lived in this valley for a thousand years until, as the tree rings show, a drought seared the land for two decades. This drought came like a furnace in 1299, and now sun and rain and wind have so blurred the pictographs that it is impossible—or rather it was impossible, before Etherege's visit—to interpret the device of three human figures which the Old Ones had set over their intaglio of the Thumb itself . . .

Etherege hurried to make camp. Beside a boulder studded with

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quartz and pyrites he set up the nylon shelter half, anchoring it with steel pitons driven into cracks of the gravelly surface. Zippered windtight at the ends, the little tent could be heated in these chilly June nights with only the gasoline lantern. To anchor it still more firmly, he lashed two belts of canvas across the top, securing their grommeted ends with other pitons. He covered the supplies with a tarpaulin and snugged its edges down with rocks. Then he dug a rain trench around his tent and supplies, leading it off toward the brink of the eleven-hundred-foot sides.

In the twilight the eight or nine acres of his little empire floated like a magic island above the valley. The bands of crimson and turquoise overhead might have adorned the mindless world a million years ago. This sky would discreetly receive pterodactyls on the wing. The valley became an ocean of shadow, the mesquite and greasewood wavering like weeds on the sea floor; for as the valley cooled, its air contracted, so that upper air poured down into it—

Etherege jumped.

It was nothing—a chipmunk.

Etherege shrugged. He knew why he was jumpy. His expedition to The Thumb of God was an evasion. Actually he was in retreat from his marriage. At least, he needed solitude in which to consider how he might save a marriage that was sick because his wife Evelyn was childless and without prospect of children.

A man of large affairs can involve such a wife in his business strategies, to her pleasure and excitement. But George Etherege was a small real estate broker with no large affairs to offer.

He saw women like Evelyn dive into community service, only to discover that work without wages is without incentive. He saw them drift into the boredom of bridge playing and gossip. They made a career of nothingness and, logically, became nothing.

Or, as Evelyn had done, they find a job, usually beneath their capacities. Such jobs merely alter the shape of their discontent. Highly educated, sharp-minded, a clever wordmonger, Evelyn became civilian despatcher in the control tower of the Incantado Air Base.

The eyes of such wives wander. Already guilty, they seek further guilt in order to insure a punishment they do not know they crave. The luck of such a wife is bad; her husband's luck is bad. The luck of George and Evelyn Etherege was bad; and just now, with no particular inclination either for or against adultery, Evelyn's eyes had wandered to Major Wilmot, whose empty glitter offered yesterday's heroism and today's need, and to whom everything was meaningless—love, money, murder . . .

Suddenly, thunderheads raced over the Enchanted Mountains.

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Hard driven, the rain clouds flowed over the crimson and turquoise sky like a puddle of ink. Cold wind tore at him, and with a hiss the rain was upon him. He stood for a moment braced against the storm; then he dove for the tent.

A true mesa, the pinnacle was formed of everlasting stuff, the lava core of a volcano. In the wind and rain of millenia the volcano itself had melted away. Now its core trembled in the tumult. Etherege had an uneasy sense of sliding off. Within the Thumb, who knew what flaws of structure might widen, gape, then fly apart?

Quickly the rain brimmed over his shallow trench. The snug island of his air mattress rose above the flood, and he burrowed into his sleeping bag like an animal. The gasoline lantern jiggled. He reached over and closed the valve. Now he was safely hidden in the dark. The pinnacle rocked to the slam of thunder. He knew that huge snake-tongues of lightning were flicking out over all nine hundred square miles of the valley.

He had a delicious sense of relief. Tomorrow The Thumb of God would be fresh and clean. For millenia it had been remote from the flatland, its plants and animals isolated. If isolated, perhaps different? And if different, how different?

Etherege snuggled deeper into his sleeping bag. He forgot the Major; he even forgot Evelyn. He drowsed like a little boy on Christmas Eve thinking greedily of tomorrow's presents underneath the shining tree.

In the morning the air sparkled under the sun. Each pebble seemed cleansed and special and set apart. Under this sane and tonic sun his drowsy imaginings of queer plants and beasts seemed frivolous. Birds could carry to the pinnacle the seeds of valley plants; probably small animals could scale the talus-strewn sides, though they rose eleven hundred feet.

At breakfast Etherege threw slices of bread to the chipmunks peeping at him bright-eyed from a hundred ambushes. A furry little pirate raced to each slice, picked it up in his forepaws, and scurried off. Each time the little fellow tumbled flat on his face, and each time he scrabbled up, scurrying blindly to fall flat again. Etherege laughed, and—

Jumped again.

He could not tell what it was, it sped so swiftly; perhaps a lizard. He was still nervous, almost afraid. Just what had he expected, anyhow? Saber-toothed tigers?

Examining a ferrocactus with ruby hooks, and then a larkspur, Etherege drifted toward the cleft. It was deeper than he had thought, perhaps forty feet or so, trenched across the summit. He moved farther, to peer down. A little farther . . . And then he saw them.

The cleft was a private theater in which they had played out their drama beneath the indifferent sky.

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Though tranquil now, it still somehow reverberated with the energy which had once convulsed it, and the actors lay as though at rest for a moment between their scenes. Now Etherege began to understand the meaning of the threefold device above the pictographs of the Hohokam.

Two of the skeletons lay in attitudes easy to understand; and after a moment the third was understandable, too. The two male skeletons lay mingled, their white skulls grinning at each other. Each skull was broken, one at the left temple, the other between the eyes; and peering through the bleached basketry of bones Etherege saw the two obsidian axheads from which the hafts and thongs had long since rotted away.

Twenty feet to the north, beneath a natural bench in the lava wall, the little female skeleton lay jumbled like the framework of a discarded doll. Dying, she had slipped off the bench, after watching—for how long? Flesh lost crispness; the big birds came. There was a little pile of stones beside her; she had hoarded weapons against the gluttonous birds, and she had died before she could fling them all.

Her bones were without blemish. Among them were scraps of turquoise from her belt and headdress; tiny silver cones, like little bells, had once hung from her wedding skirt of antelope skin.

A simple story of the Old Ones: *Hundreds of years ago the lovers meet, glance, respond. Finally his friend carries to her family his gift.*

During five nights, in the ancient ceremony, they sit beside each other, vowed to silence, while the tribe feasts and the sorcerer intones. Then their fingers are incised. The song is sung, the pollen sprinkled. Escorted by joking climbers, they reach the pinnacle top by a talus pathway later destroyed by order of the chief. In antelope-skin bags, maidens bring their food: preparations of mesquite, sumac berries, yucca and sahuaro fruit, acorns.

The woven willow bower is ready; the guides depart. They are alone; and with uneasy laughter she runs and teases, and runs again. They are alone—until that night. Weapon in his teeth, sweating with fear of the taboos he outrages, The Jealous Man slithers up The Thumb of God.

So they die of each other. Perhaps she helps one to die; and she will not eat the wedding pastes. She sits and weeps. From time to time she shames herself by sleeping. She flings stones until she cannot fling them any more. And at last she dies.

Soon The Curious Man climbs to see. Then he whispers to the chief, who commands the men and the magician. The pictographs are incised. Thereafter the path is torn away and sorcery wreathes the pinnacle with impregnable spells. Wind sweeps the pinnacle; and all the tribe is dead, long ago. Dead, all dead, long ago; and even their legend is dying now . . .

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The story written in the ancient skeletons shocked George Etherege alive. It burned into his brain a new and clean perspective of himself. He was like a man of wretched eyesight fitted at last with corrective lenses. Now he seemed to see truly. Far down in the valley, with a sudden scud, antelope leaped and drifted in the air. Etherege *saw* them drift.

Beside his left boot a hummingbird hovered at the red calyx of a larkspur. Hummingbirds, he remembered, seek red flowers. But bees seek blue flowers, and moths white, night-blooming ones; while those blossoms that employ the wind, independent of the whims of birds or insects, tend to be dim-hued. Incredible.

He bent to examine the structure of the larkspur: poison, drawn from the innocent compounds of the earth. Yet each stalk, with its aristocratic corollas, had the shining candor of music by Mozart. He seemed to see each particular spear of elk-grass embedded among the larkspur. He saw, he truly saw, a dark vein of steatite wandering across a rock. Mica and quartz shone everywhere, with astonishing glints.

Etherege sneezed three times, so sharp and clear did the sun suddenly seem to him, with its hot remote yellow. Looking down from The Thumb of God, he saw the sphericity of the earth. He could almost see it turning lazily, unsupported, in space. Shadows lengthened—he could see them lengthen—and he saw the intertwined movements of sun and earth, floating like bubbles in eternity.

"Oh, you damned fool, you!"

As he had arranged to do, he radioed Evelyn at noon. Flickers of impulse sped improbably across the valley to the air base.

"Hello? Hello? Evelyn?"

"George? George, the control tower's busy, so I'm calling from that drone B-29 on the parking apron beside Operations."

He spoke across thirty miles of empty air. "It must be pretty hot in the plane."

"Yes, it is hot."

"We're going to have to come up here together sometime. It's quite a place."

"I suppose you found the last of the dinosaurs up there? Or a snake that plays the violin? Or a plant that writes sonnets? In Sanskrit?"

"Just some chipmunks that talk philosophy. And in plain English."

Evelyn tried. She tried hard to return to an old fondness. She revived an old childishness of theirs and in a little girl's voice she said, *"Bring me a cute present, huh, boss?"*

Etherege tried, too, "One for every little pinfeather, duckling."

A timid and forlorn ghost of fondness rose up. But Etherege went on, "It was nice of Wilmot to fly me over, don't you think?"

"You mean drive, don't you, not fly. Pilots are just plain ordinary airplane-drivers, aren't they?"

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Etherege saw her clearly, there in the huge plane, tiny and absurd. She was suddenly as pathetic as a well bred little girl, puzzled and beseeching. She was his wife. It would not be easy. It might even be impossible. But he must try. He must.

"George? Please be careful with Wilmot?"

"Careful?"

"We had a talk, a rather formal talk, and he's—well—disturbed."

"I'll be careful. See you soon, darling. A completely renovated character will see you soon."

"You do sound different, George."

"Duckling, I am different."

The withdrawal of Evelyn's voice annihilated his last bridge with the world. The wind of the valley was still. The chipmunks were at siesta, and so alive was he now that a panicky loneliness sprang at him. It occurred to him that the loneliest places on earth are not the savage retreats of swamp or crag or desert where man has never been. Instead, they are the places where man has lived, but from which he has gone away forever.

And Evelyn was his wife.

During his last night on The Thumb of God, Etherege watched a three-quarter moon drift down the sky. Hundreds of thousands of miles away, yet it summoned the seas and governed the rhythms of living creatures. In the moonlight the ancient murder place was like a stage. The bleached bones were bedded gently in silvery shadow. Etherege stood erect over them and he spoke carefully.

"May I?" he asked. "For a talisman?"

Crickets chirped, but the past offered no rebuke. He bent and gently tugged a silver cone from among her little bones, for himself. And then one more. For Evelyn.

"Thank you, Princess," Etherege said. "Sleep well."

The helicopter fluttered onto the pinnacle punctually. The Jealous Man grunted up the talus, but The Empty Man strode to The Thumb of God across the red sky. The legs of Wilmot's coveralls fluttered in the draft of the idling rotor. He stood as negligently as an exquisite of the Eighteenth Century awaiting a duel. Then he began to act out a sinister charade, speaking with horrid courtesy.

"You know, Etherege," he said, "you aren't up here on this silly Cleopatra's Needle. You aren't really here at all." He casually indicated the desert below. "You're down there—down at the foot of the needle."

Etherege said nothing.

Wilmot smiled carefully; his tone grew elaborate. "Oh, to be sure, you came here," he said. "I brought you here myself. And your good wife Evelyn knows that you came here, because you talked with her on the radio. She and I had just had a little talk when you called . . . You came

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here, Etherege, and you made your camp. Then you were all alone with your wretched little soul."

Wilmot's words droned like an incantation as he came slowly closer. The performance was one of finished art. Etherege felt like laughing.

"Oh, how you thought, eh, Etherege? How you squirmed in the intricate little labyrinth of your psyche."

Wilmot was quite close now. "But consider this, if you please, Etherege. While you took stock of your miserable little self, you forgot just where you were, didn't you?"

Wilmot was a big man. He raised his arms and stretched powerfully. "Yes, I'm afraid you forgot where you were, and you fell right off this edge, poor fellow, didn't you? And so when I came for you this afternoon, you weren't here at all. You were down there, weren't you?"

Etherege stood there for a moment, fascinated. He had been a soulful wretch, a bore and a retreater and a crybaby; and the truth of this so disarmed him that his duty, it seemed, was to act the accomplice in his own murder.

"Or perhaps you'd save me the trouble?" Wilmot asked. "Perhaps you'd be good enough to toddle over the edge all by your little self?"

Lunacy enveloped them; the oblique logic of lunacy prevailed. Etherege realized dreamily that Wilmot proposed to walk up to him, seize him, and wrestle him to the brink. And Wilmot was determined to go over, too. The very core of the charade was Wilmot's going over, too.

Etherege touched the silver cones in his pocket. Snug in the fist, a bank-wrapped roll of silver dimes fortifies the blow. Base to base in the fist, a pair of silver cones will serve as well. Etherege laughed.

The laughter startled Wilmot even as Etherege's blow, hard to the temple, knocked him cleanly down.

Fondling the cones, Etherege stood staring out over the valley toward the Enchanted Mountains. Then he walked to the radio. There was the hum of warm-up and then suddenly the sane bellow of engines on the test block at the air base. Etherege heard Evelyn on another phone talking down a damaged Navy ship.

"Tell Mrs. Etherege we'll be there in half an hour, will you please? Yes, Wilmot just got here."

Wilmot was unsteadily on his feet. "Wily of you, Etherege. Takes the shine off my little prank."

"My compliments, Major. A splendid job. You probably deserved better."

Wilmot inspected him curiously. He was utterly composed now, like a woman slapped out of hysterics. "Just what have you been doing up here, anyhow? You act as if you'd brewed yourself a jug of *tiswin*."

"Let's get out of here, Major."

As Etherege fingered the silver cones a silly question occurred to

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him—whether the plural was *talismans* or *talismen*. He must ask Evelyn, that dear wordmonger, when he gave her hers.

"You know," Etherege said, "I think it would be nice if *you* loaded my gear, Major."

Major Wilmot stiffened. His face was bleak. He may have needed Evelyn very much; surely he needed someone. Then, with great effort, he grinned. It occurred to Etherege that this might be one of Wilmot's very last grins.

"Fair enough," said Major Wilmot.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HENRY SLESAR**

TITLE: ***The Mad Killer***

TYPE: Multiple Murder

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A sixteen-year-old boy had apparently gone berserk—and there was terror in the streets. The mad killer didn't know any of his victims —he just murdered at random . . .*

THE BOY HAD PALE, RESTLESS EYES, and big hands that dangled from limp wrists. His mouth hung open, and his fingers had the habit of twisting the forelock of his sandy hair. Even at sixteen, the hair was showing signs of thinning. He would probably go bald in a few more years—if the State let him live that long.

Frank Bellman, the public defender assigned to the hopeless task of the boy's defense, spent only fifteen minutes with his client. When he left the cell, his blunt, weary face was sadder and wearier than ever, and detective sergeant Joe Maddern noticed it when Frank entered his small, dim office.

"Buck up, fella," Joe said paternally, pushing a chair toward the attorney. "Sit down and talk about it." The spread between their ages wasn't great, but nineteen years in a precinct where three out of four offenders were minors had given Joe the permanent aspect of a worried parent.

"It's a bad one," Frank said. "You wonder why they bother with all the icing. The kid's a psycho. He doesn't need a lawyer—he needs a doctor."

"Sure," Joe said.

The detective passed over a crumpled pack of cigarettes, and Frank dug one out. He took three puffs in silence, then said, "This fellow Corey. What's the hospital say?"

"They think he'll live. The knife must have glanced off a rib and just missed the heart. Doesn't make any difference, though. Not to you."

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"No," Frank sighed. "Not now. Not with three other murders. You got the dope on Corey yet?"

Joe picked up a sheet of paper from his desk.

"You won't like this. His full name is James L. Corey, and he's thirty-five. He's an associate editor for an industrial trade magazine called *Iron*. Married, two kids. This is the rough part. He's a war veteran, Pacific Theater and Korea. Loaded with decorations, including the Purple Heart. Lower left leg is artificial." He put the paper down and looked grave. "Doesn't make for sympathy. If you can't prove the kid is psycho . . ." He spread his hands in a hopeless gesture.

"But why Corey?" Frank said angrily. "What did the kid have against him? What harm was he doing him?"

"I dunno, fella. Far as we can tell, the kid didn't have anything against his other three victims either. Just killed at random. That's real nut stuff, Frank. You know that."

"Yeah." The attorney got up and walked to the water cooler. He came back with a cup and said, "Once more, Joe. Let's go over it once more."

"Sure, Frank."

"The first guy he killed. That was sniper stuff, right?"

"Guess you can call it that. Man's name was John MacMillan, a truck driver. Shot dead in the street on August 5th, with a .30 caliber Garand. Just walkin' down the street, out to get the paper—and bang! Kid must of been stationed on the roof across the street; bullet went from the right side of MacMillan's neck to his hip. But the kid didn't know MacMillan, Frank."

"How can we be sure?"

The detective scratched his gray head. "I'd hate to swear it in court, if that's what you mean. But we can't make any connection—none at all. It looks like a simple sniper job."

"Maybe so." Frank crushed the paper cup in his hand, grimacing. "Only snipers follow a pattern, don't they? And this kid didn't. He knifed his next victim."

"Walter Kemp, fifty, real estate dealer. A real hard-luck character. Wife died six months ago. Three months later he gets banged up in an auto accident. Then two months later a crazy kid sticks a knife in his back."

Frank looked at his watch. "It's three o'clock."

"So?"

"I thought you were going to have the kid's parents here right after noon?"

"Yeah. We sent a squad car up to Irvington this morning. It's a long trip. Traffic must be pretty heavy."

"I wish they'd get here," Frank growled. "I've got nothing to build on, Joe—nothing! Maybe he left home for a reason—"

"Maybe he got into trouble upstate," Joe said significantly. "You gotta face the possibility."

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Frank Bellman looked at the wall, thinking about the slow-witted youth in the cell, twisting away at his sandy forelock.

"All right. Tell me again. About Number Three."

"Number Three was named Louis Rapp. He was seventy years old. He was bludgeoned to death in a hallway three doors away from where MacMillan was shot, with his own cane. He was a newsdealer; the neighborhood was fond of the old guy—real fond of him."

Frank's stomach turned over. He swallowed hard, and finished the report for himself.

"Then Corey," he said. "Knifed outside of a bar."

"With witnesses," Joe Maddern added.

A patrolman stuck his head in the doorway.

"Bruton's here."

"Who?"

"The kid's old man. You want I should bring him in?"

Joe looked at the attorney. "Yeah," he said.

Harry Bruton was a beefy man with nervous hands. He was well-dressed, conservatively, with a neat striped tie and polished shoes. His heavy face was struggling with a mixture of belligerence and embarrassment. He took the seat the detective sergeant offered, and squeezed his big hands into his lap.

Maddern eased into the questioning. He learned that Bruton was a cement dealer upstate. His wife was an invalid. The kid was an only child.

"When did he leave home?" Joe asked.

"Six weeks ago," Bruton answered, flushing. "I didn't knock myself out looking for him. I'm telling you that to your face, mister. He's a no-good kid, always in trouble. I figured he'd get good and hungry and come home. I was in no hurry."

"You know the kind of trouble he's in now?"

"You think I'm surprised?" The man's voice rose almost to a shout. "You think I haven't been expecting it some day? You tell that to my wife, mister. You go up there and tell her. She thinks he's some kind of angel—"

Then Joe Maddern asked more questions, delicate questions, and Bruton's face reddened.

"No!" he said angrily. "Nothing like that! He's no idiot. He's slow, sure. His teachers'll tell you. Only he's no half-wit, mister. He's just rotten—ever since he was a little kid, he's been rotten. The things I could tell you—"

Then they were looking at photographs.

"No," Bruton said, shaking his head. "I don't know these men. I don't know why he had it in for them. It's just plain meanness, if you ask me."

"James Corey," Joe insisted. "A war veteran, with an artificial leg. You sure you don't know him?"

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"Positive."

"MacMillan, John MacMillan."

"Never heard of him!"

Frank Bellman had been silent through the interview. Now he said, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute, Joe. Corey had a wooden leg. The real estate dealer, Kemp. He was in an auto accident. What kind of damage, Joe?"

The detective frowned, then picked up a report.

"Head injury, ribs. Broken leg."

"Then Kemp was a cripple, too. Does that mean anything?"

"I dunno." Maddern studied the sheets again. "The old man, the newsdealer. Busted his hip early this year." He scowled at the attorney. "What's it mean, Frank?"

"How about MacMillan, the truck driver?"

"I don't know about him. I'll have to check."

He got up from behind the desk and left the office. Bruton waited until he was gone, then turned his growing wrath on the attorney.

"Listen! I didn't come down here to beg for the little rat. You understand me?"

"Take it easy, Mr. Bruton."

"I'm tired of this! I'm not going to hang around here all day. I've got a sick wife upstate. I've got a business that needs me. Far as I'm concerned, you can lock the little rat up for good. Is that clear?"

"Sure, Mr. Bruton. Only get this straight. Your boy is charged with three murders, maybe four. Either he's out of his head and not responsible—or he's a killer. Doesn't that bother you?"

"No!" Bruton's mouth slid around his face in an ugly wet motion. "Nothing bothers me about him any more! Understand that? Give him what he deserves—only leave me alone!"

Joe Maddern walked in.

"You were right, Frank. This fellow MacMillan. He had a clubfoot."

Bruton whirled on him. "I don't care!" he shouted. "I don't care what he did! You do what you want. Only leave me alone!"

He got up, kicked the chair aside, and stomped to the door of the detective's office. His shoulders were hunched high, and the back of his neck was red. For the first time, the attorney and the detective noticed the pronounced limp.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT BLOCH**

TITLE: ***Dig That Crazy Grave!***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: A college town

TIME: Now

COMMENTS: *The tale of a six-man jazz combo led by the famous JoJo Jones—a tale of the long moan of the cat on the oh-so-cool tin roof—a tale of jive jargon and kicks and being hep and letting them send you and letting it pour out—but mostly a tale of the big kick.*

WHEN PROFESSOR TALMADGE heard about Jojo Jones coming to town, he was very excited. He called Dorothy right away.

"We've got a date tomorrow night," he told her. "Jojo Jones is opening out at The Mirror Club."

Dorothy was excited too. "Darling, what a break! Do you think he'll help you on the book?"

"Could be. Anyway, we're going to see him."

Talmadge picked Dorothy up about nine and they drove out. Word must have got around fast, because there was quite a crowd on hand. Talmadge recognized a lot of kids from the college, and several of them recognized him. Some of them did so directly—with a "Hi, Professor!"—and others merely did a double-take and then whispered to their companions. Everybody seemed genuinely surprised to see him—no one, of course, knew he was writing a book on jazz.

Except Dorothy, and they hugged their secret together as they took a table just off the edge of the dance floor. It was nearly a quarter to ten, but the bandstand was still deserted. Talmadge could sense the restless anticipation of the crowd, and he and Dorothy shared it.

Then all at once the combo filed in. The manager of The Mirror Club went up to the microphone

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and made a little announcement, and JoJo Jones took over.

Everyone in the place stared up at the men on the stand, but the musicians didn't stare back. They sat down—six men in blazer jackets—and unpacked their instruments slowly from battered cases. Clarinet, trombone, horn, bass. One of the men drifted over to the piano and diddled a few notes. JoJo Jones set up the drums.

All six musicians had pale faces, and they wore a look of boredom. They seemed oblivious of the audience, and of one another.

Dorothy shook her head. "Are you sure this is *the* Jojo Jones?" she asked Talmadge. "I mean, he looks so *young*."

"He was just a kid when he started out," Talmadge reminded her. "They all were. Bix and Tesch and the Chicago crowd, and B.G." Then he remembered that Dorothy was not really a jazz buff, so he interpreted—"Bix" was Bix Beiderbecke, "Tesch" was Frank Teschemacher, and "B.G." of course was Benny Goodman. Unconsciously his manner became professorial, for Talmadge was neither a jazz buff nor an aficionado. He was a student, and to him it was always a matter of accurate data. He told Dorothy that Muggsy Spanier's first name was really Francis—in exactly the same tone of voice he'd use to tell her that Ulysses S. Grant's first name was really Hiram.

Dorothy giggled. "Do you suppose JoJo Jones dyes his hair?" she wanted to know. "I expected an old man with a long white beard. Couldn't this be someone else using the same name?"

"I can't answer that one until I've heard them play," Talmadge said. "Looks like they're starting now."

They were seated, poised and ready, as JoJo Jones raised his drumstick. Then came the down-beat, and the answer flooded forth.

It was *the* JoJo Jones, all right. From the first paradiddle on, it was unmistakable. The sidemen may have changed, but not the style nor the arrangements. Here was the JoJo Jones of the fabulous Twenties, the JoJo Jones who had recorded for Okeh and Vocalion and the old Brunswick company.

Talmadge had the records, Dorothy had heard them many times, and she recognized the music. So did the crowd. They didn't attempt to dance. This rhythm went to the head, not to the feet. The audience was content to listen. Talmadge nodded, wondering how a six-piece outfit could pour such power into oldies like *High Society, Nobody's Sweetheart, Muskrat Ramble*. JoJo's drumming wove its way through vintage arrangements, and when Talmadge closed his eyes there was an illusion of tremendous volume. So much so that when the set finally ended, the sudden silence hit like a cymbal-crash.

Talmadge blinked and looked over at Dorothy.

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"Wow!" she said. "This boy doesn't fool, does he?"

"Like it?"

"Tremendous."

Then their voices were lost in the buzz of surrounding conversation. Talmadge smiled because he knew what was going on. This college crowd took jazz as seriously as French students take their politics—and in as many schisms. "Chicago jazz" fans would argue with the devotees of Dave Brubeck, and the apostles of Dizzy Gillespie clashed with the Gerry Mulligan followers. It was an interesting sociological development, this jazz-cult, and Talmadge was putting the whole thing into his projected book.

A clarinet cut through the confusion and a second set was on. The sound changed subtly, because now Jones was playing the jazz of the Thirties—the jazz of the Dorsey Brothers and Artie Shaw and Duke Ellington. A touch of Dixieland, a torrent of what used to be called "swing"; the drive, the intensity, rocked relentlessly through the room.

The crowd shouted, and the white faces on the bandstand suddenly came alive. JoJo gave a signal and they skipped their intended break, going right into another set.

The Forties this time. Glenn Miller and Stan the Man Kenton, and then the "new sound." Faster and faster, solo after solo, offbeat and offbar, and into the stuff from the bottom of the cage at Birdland. JoJo was moving them along with his drums, through the Forties and then into the Fifties, stepping up the tempo as he time-traveled them relentlessly.

Talmadge watched that pale white face, the face that was almost blank with inner concentration, and tried to read the expression. Where had he seen that look before? Only on the faces of women during ecstasy. Only in dreams, when the statues come alive and move, and the great hands from the sky reach down to pluck at your entrails and play them like a bass; when they jam the mouth of the trumpet in your eye and the valves move of their own accord to blow your brains out.

It was happening now. He could feel the tram sliding up and down his spine; he could hear the piano in his head as the left hand marched mercilessly across the sponge inside his skull. And JoJo was tomtomming on his eardrums. JoJo was playing *him* now, the band was playing the audience like an instrument—a great instrument that screamed and shouted and moaned the long moan of the cat on the oh-so-cool tin roof.

Shave and a haircut, two bits.

Was it really over?

Yes, because JoJo's jacket was now drenched with sweat, and his palms were red where the nails had dug into them, and his legs were stiff with tension; but the sound had ceased.

The players began filing off the

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bandstand, working their way through the crowd of bobby-soxers —*jailbait, man!*—and earnest adolescents with fountain pens and copies of "Downbeat" opened at a picture spread.

Talmadge watched JoJo Jones as he brushed past their table on the way to the bar. He would have liked to stop him, but felt this wasn't the right time. Dorothy apparently thought differently. She reached up and tugged at the musician's sleeve.

"Care to join us for a drink?" she asked.

JoJo looked down at her. Evidently he liked what he saw because he nodded and pulled out a chair.

Dorothy introduced herself. "Dorothy Daniels. And this is Professor Talmadge—he's been wanting to meet you for years. He's writing a book on jazz."

"Take five, man."

JoJo Jones extended his hand and Talmadge grasped it. The hand was cold. JoJo didn't return his smile, because he was staring at Dorothy.

"—of course I've heard all your old records," she was saying. "But I just couldn't believe it was you until I heard you play. I mean, you're so young."

JoJo shrugged. "I'm forty-eight. Don't let the crewcut and horn-rims fool you. And Figgy is over fifty."

Talmadge interrupted. "Figgy? You don't mean Figgy Newton on trumpet?"

"That's the cat."

"I thought I recognized the style, but I wasn't sure. The crewcut fooled me too."

"Standard equipment, Dad. Crewcut, horn-rims. Musician's Local won't let you book into a place without you look like this Dave Garroway character."

The waitress came and took their order. Two boys walked over and asked for autographs, but they didn't stay. When the drinks arrived, JoJo turned to Talmadge and asked, "What's this I dig about a book?"

Talmadge smiled. "Seems as if nearly everyone is doing a book on jazz these days. I thought I might as well get into the act. Not the usual history, though—the sociological approach."

"Sounds like a real crazy bit."

"Perhaps we could get together some time. I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Glad, Dad."

"Are you free tomorrow? During the day?"

JoJo shook his head. "This cat loves his pad. I don't howl and prowl until the cool of the evening."

Dorothy leaned forward. "I don't mean to be rude," she said, "but why do all you musicians talk that way?"

"Stock arrangement. Like the cheaters and the hair-do. Give the square his share." JoJo's eyes met hers. "You dig me?"

"I dig you," Dorothy said. "The most."

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"Solid gone for real?"

"I dig you," Dorothy said, "enough to know that it's all a silly, stupid act. You're a grown man and a great musician. You don't have to wear a loud jacket and crop your hair and hide your eyes behind horm-rims. You don't have to hide your thoughts behind this juvenile jive-jargon, either. Why do you do it?"

"For a kick, chick. Strictly for kicks." JoJo wasn't smiling now. "but you wouldn't know about kicks, would you, doll? That Columbus cat was wrong—the world is square."

Talmadge coughed. "Er, that's one of the things I'd like to discuss with you at some future time," he said. "The position of jazz musicians and devotees as a self-constituted in-group, with their own vocabulary and idiom."

"Sounds real nervous, man." JoJo stood up. "Thanks for the sauce. Now I've got to trample back up there and play pretty for the people. Stick around until after, we'll have a ball."

Talmadge opened his mouth to acknowledge the invitation, but Dorothy cut in. "No, thanks," she said. "We really must be going."

JoJo nodded calmly. "You don't like the juke, don't spend your nickels," he said. And walked away.

Dorothy rose and Talmadge followed her out.

"Something upset you?" he asked.

"No. But I'm afraid all this smoke has given me a headache." She paused. "You can stay if you like."

"Oh, there's always another time. Maybe we can stop in again next weekend."

"Yes." But she didn't sound enthusiastic about it, and when they were in the car riding back, Talmadge questioned her.

"What got you angry all of a sudden?"

"I wasn't angry, darling. But there's something about that man that irritates me. He's such a *phoney*. It gets on my nerves to see him act like a character out of a cheap movie."

"He told you why he does it. The customers expect that sort of thing."

"Nonsense! Remember the night we met Benny Goodman? He doesn't talk that way. Lots of fine jazz musicians don't—they aren't all a bunch of dope addicts or eccentrics, you know that. And not all jazz fans are peculiar, either. Those kids who came up asking for autographs were perfectly normal and well-behaved. But your JoJo Jones seems to be putting on a deliberate act. I got the feeling he was sitting back and laughing at us all the time."

"Don't underestimate the man. You heard him give what amounted to a musical history of jazz tonight—from Oliver right up to the day after tomorrow. He knows what he's doing."

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"That makes him even more of a hypocrite."

"Wait until we sit down and really talk with him, get to know him better."

"Sorry, count me out." She was shivering beside Talmadge in the car, and her voice shivered, too. "There's something *wrong* about that man."

"But you have to admit his playing is out of this world."

"Too far out." Dorothy shuddered again. "Please, let's talk about something else."

They talked about something else, but Dorothy went right on shivering during the ride home, and when Talmadge kissed her good night her lips were still trembling.

Talmadge's lips trembled when he walked into The Mirror Club the following Saturday. It was past one, and as he expected, the band had just finished for the night. He'd anticipated this might be a good time to catch JoJo Jones in a free moment, while he was sitting around and relaxing after cutting the last set. Sure enough, the drummer was perched on a stool at the bar.

But Talmadge hadn't expected to see Dorothy Daniels sitting next to him.

He had called her three times during the week, asking for a date, and she had put him off each time. He'd phoned again this evening, suggesting they go out as they always did on Saturday nights, and once again she had stalled. He'd believed her when she said she had a headache and would stay home.

Yet here she was, sitting next to JoJo Jones. And smiling. And leaning forward. And putting her hand on his arm in that familiar gesture he knew so well. Talmadge noted that she was wearing the blue dress, the lowcut one that she claimed always embarrassed her because of what happened if she didn't remember to keep sitting back. Well, she wasn't sitting back now.

Talmadge's lips trembled, and for a moment he thought of turning around and walking out before anyone noticed him.

Then it was too late, because Dorothy was laughing at something JoJo had said, and she looked around, spotted him, and waved.

He went over to the bar.

"Hi, Dad!" said JoJo.

Talmadge nodded. "How's it going?" he asked, not particularly caring what he said just as long as he could say something and see if he could keep his voice under control.

"Great, man! This is a real gone spot—we've had 'em climbing the walls every night, haven't we, sugar?"

"Right, Pops."

That was Dorothy talking. Dorothy—this girl in the lowcut blue dress, leaning over and letting everybody and his brother take a look. Dorothy—this stranger with the heavy makeup and the un-

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familiar bright red fingernails that were long and pointed like the claws of a cat. A real crazy cat.

Talmadge heard himself say, "Every night, eh? Is that right, Dorothy?"

"You heard the man."

JoJo grinned at him. "Don't get me wrong, Dad—I ain't been queering your solo. Just giving the chick a kick. She likes to sit up on the stand when we give out—sort of get the feel of it, you know? Now she can really dig. Now she can get with it, can't you, baby?"

"The most," Dorothy said. "Darling, you'll have to try it yourself one of these nights."

Talmadge nodded but didn't answer. Then JoJo stood up. "Sit down, toss the sauce. I'll be flying back."

He walked off in the direction of the Men's Room. Talmadge took a stool and deliberately stared down the front of Dorothy's dress.

"Every night you've come here," he murmured.

"Well, what of it?" Dorothy didn't look at him. "I got to thinking that maybe I was wrong, that maybe I'd done the man an injustice. I drove out and listened again. He saw me, came over and talked. That's how it started."

"How what started?"

"Nothing. Nothing like what you're thinking. We just talked. He's different when he's alone. None of this hep stuff then. He talks about music and sensation and what it does to you, what it does *for* you. But you wouldn't understand that. You couldn't. You have to sit up there with the band and let them send you. Feel them send the crowd. That's the big kick."

Talmadge nodded again. "You're for kicks now too, is that it?"

"Just this one. Just listening, and letting the crowd pour it on to you. You sit up there behind the music, and they let go with everything they've got—you feel it coming up, beating against you in waves. All the emotions. All the energy. All the desire, and the frustration, and the aching just pours out. You can almost taste it."

"Sounds like it's habit-forming."

He was trying to play it for laughs, but she seemed serious. "That's what JoJo says. He's been doing it for thirty years now. Claims that's all that keeps him alive, keeps him young." She smiled. "I'm beginning to understand musicians a little better now, I guess. Not the commercial ones, but the real cats, like JoJo and his boys. The ones who're willing to play in little offbeat spots like this, or ride the crummy busses for one-night stands in Fallen Armpits, Nebraska. The ones who won't join the big outfits or cut hit records, because they aren't interested in money if it means playing commercial jazz. Like JoJo says, they're out for kicks. And once you've felt that big kick, you know why."

She looked up, pausing abruptly,

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and Talmadge realized that JoJo was back. He stood behind them quietly, and the rest of the boys were with him. Talmadge recognized Figgy Newton; at close range it was possible to detect the telltale wrinkles and the pasty pouches under the eyes. It was also possible to detect the acrid reek that hovered over the entire group, and Talmadge began to realize what they'd been doing out in the Men's Room. The youngest of the group, the kid who played piano, still had a butt in his mouth. He took a final puff, sucking in air noisily along with the last drag of charge, then ground the reefer under his heel.

JoJo put his hands on Dorothy's shoulders. "We're putting the show on the road," he said. "Flying down to Figgy's pad. Gonna be a big bash tonight." As Dorothy rose, the musician turned to Talmadge. "You want in?" he asked.

Talmadge looked at Dorothy. She turned away, fumbling with her purse.

"No, thanks," he said. "I've got to be running along. Some other time."

"Sad, Dad." JoJo waved genially.

"I'll call you tomorrow," Talmadge said. Dorothy didn't answer, and he hated himself for having said it. But he had to. Just as he had to walk out now, pretending nothing had happened, pretending that he didn't care.

He was all set to pretend again the next day, when he called Dorothy at her apartment. But he needn't have bothered, because she wasn't there.

She wasn't there in the morning, nor in the afternoon, nor that night. And she didn't come in late, either. Talmadge would have known: he was waiting for her, parked outside her building for five hours.

He called her office Monday morning, determined to have it out with her, but that was no good either. The girl who answered the phone said that Miss Daniels was no longer with the company.

So Talmadge went out to The Mirror Club again on Monday night. Dorothy hadn't lied about one thing. She really did sit up there behind the band.

And Talmadge sat down below, watching her, watching them, watching the crowd, feeling the music flow down and the emotion flow up. After a while he just watched Dorothy's face—the white face, white with a pallor the makeup could only partially hide. And no amount of makeup could hide the glassy immobility of her stare, nor its startling resemblance to the faces of the musicians in the combo.

Maybe it was because they were all on charge, or even horse. Maybe it was because they all slept days and stayed up nights. Maybe it was because they never ate, only drank. Or maybe it was because they had been sitting up there so long, playing so hard, and drinking in all that raw emotion. Night after night after

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night of kicks. The big kick. It had got them, and it had got Dorothy.

When the break came, Talmadge didn't wait for her to leave the stand. He walked right up and hailed her.

"How about a kind word?" he called.

She scowled. "Go away," she said.

"But, Dorothy, I've got to talk to you—"

"Save it for a sick friend."

She rose and moved away down the platform, to join JoJo and the boys as they filed off. She nudged Figgy Newton in the ribs and murmured something Talmadge couldn't catch. He laughed and glanced at Talmadge out of the corner of his eye. Nobody else bothered to look at him.

Talmadge brushed through the crowd to get to the other side of the stand. He made it just in time to catch Dorothy by the arm. She wheeled around, facing him, and he got a closeup of her face. It was like a clown-mask with eyes.

"Dorothy, what's happened? They told me you quit your job—"

"We're closing tonight. Off to Buffalo."

"You're going away?"

"You dig me. *We*'re going."

"When did you decide? Dorothy, what's happened to you, anyway?"

She gave a little offkey laugh. "What is this, the $64,000 Question?"

He could smell the charge now. She was loaded.

"Dorothy, come on home with me. We have to straighten things out."

"It's all straight, gate. Straight, great. Straight and flying right. Excuse please, man. Got a call for a ball."

And then she slipped from his grasp and was gone, out the side door, following the others.

Going out to the cars, Talmadge thought. Out for a charge, or a jolt and a bolt, or a quick kick in the back seat. The hot images poured down on him in waves, scalding his eyeballs.

He had to sit down. He found a place at the bar and heard himself ordering. One fast drink. Two fast drinks. One more for the road, and then he could go out to the parking lot and find her. It was time for a showdown.

No, too late. Talmadge blinked as he heard the downbeat. JoJo Jones and his combo were back on the bandstand, and although he couldn't see them from his seat out here at the bar, he could hear the band at work. He could hear the braying and the squealing and the thumping and the tinkling and the booming. That's all it was, heard at a distance. Just noise, an animal bleating, savage and senseless. And the walls and the floor shook with a boom-boom-boom.

That would be old JoJo on the drums. Boom-boom-boom. JoJo's drums and *his* heart.

The rhythm was senseless, but it didn't have to make sense. It was mindless but it didn't have to reach the mind. It could reach something

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else—the body, the nerves, the dark places where the blood runs swiftly. The blood obeyed, the body obeyed, the heart pumped faster, and everything began to pour out. The beat cut into you and made the opening so the sound could pour in, and when the sound poured in everything else poured out. Simple displacement. You couldn't hold both. So you took the sound and gave up yourself.

The drums did it, of course. Talmadge remembered the drums—the basis of all ritual, all magic. Drums made the savages dance around the fires, drums drove them to die in battle, drums thundered on the hills when they gathered to invoke the dark forces of the night. In every age, in every culture, the drums ruled. They ruled and they rolled and they rocked round the clock.

It was magic.

Talmadge got up and walked to the doorway, staring into the ballroom. He could see JoJo up there on the platform, bending over his tomtoms. JoJo's face was a mask that wizards wear; it was catatonic trance; it was every known name and learned label for one and the same thing—the eternal ecstasy of the magician in complete communion with his worshippers. Communion and control. He ruled the drums and the drums ruled them. They danced like puppets, like jerky automatons.

Talmadge shook his head groggily. His eyes searched for Dorothy. Then he realized she wasn't on the platform with the band. She must still be outside in one of the cars.

He made for the doorway. The cool air—*cool, man, real cool!*—hit him hard. He scuffed along the driveway—*kicks, Dad, kicks!*—and he peered into the dark recesses of the parked cars. He was way down at the end of the line—*long gone, cat!*—when he saw her white face. It was lolling against the rear seat of an old heap backed against the side wall of the roadhouse.

Talmadge called to the girl but she didn't answer.

He opened the door of the car but she didn't stir.

He climbed in and sat down next to her, but she didn't open her eyes or look up. Not even when he put his arms around her, not even when he took her hand, not even when he held his breath and placed his palm over her heart.

There was something wrong with her heart. Something wrong with the rhythm. The beat was missing. She wasn't getting with it. *Wake up, doll, this is a ball!*

But the doll didn't wake up. The white doll would never wake up. It just crumpled grotesquely in Talmadge's arms, and he was stroking one of the limp arms and then looking at it in the light—looking at the place where one of the magicians had stuck a pin into the doll. Maybe there was a little too much H on the end of the pin. Maybe this doll had a weak heart. Those things hap-

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pened. Every once in a while they happened.

Talmadge swallowed hard. Then he leaned out of the window and was sick. After that he sat there for a long time, just holding the doll in his arms. He was trying to think things out—about magicians, or was it musicians? And the way some of them lived—the dedicated ones, the ones who went in for kicks.

After a while he thought he had it straight.

By this time the music had stopped and the cars were pulling out of the parking area all around him, so he knew the place must be closing down for the night.

It was time to go back inside and tell them.

Talmadge put Dorothy down on the seat and walked back into The Mirror Club.

The lights were going out over the bar, and the bartender was putting on his coat. Back in the ballroom only a single bulb burned over the bandstand.

Talmadge walked in just as the boys were packing up. Figgy and the horn and the tram were closing their little black cases—their little black cases that looked like coffins. And JoJo was getting ready to cart away his drums.

They all had that waxen look under the light, but there was something else—something Talmadge recognized now. He could sense the repletion, the satiation in their stare. They'd had plenty to drink tonight. Plenty of emotion, plenty of vitality, plenty of kicks. They'd taken it from the audience, and they'd taken it from Dorothy. That's why they'd slipped her the H—to restore her vitality, so that they could drink it up again. That's how they got their kicks—drink the audience, drink the dolls, and if nothing else was available for nourishment, drink each other or even themselves.

He thought of all the "real gone" musicians who were really gone these days. Gone forever, because they had doped and drunk themselves to death. They had died for licks and kicks—lived a little and then died a lot.

Talmadge looked up. Apparently he had been saying these things out loud for quite some time—because JoJo Jones was standing next to him and trying to steer him over into the shadows. But he had to go on.

"—used to wonder, like Dorothy did, why you were such an in-group. All dressing alike, looking alike, living the same way. Shunning the daylight, but always keeping that youthful appearance year after year in spite of drugs and alcohol and sex and sensation. I might have guessed it was magic, and that the language you use is a part of it—like the old secret code the witchcraft cults taught their followers. I might have guessed that, but I never expected to find Dracula wearing horn-rims."

"Take five, man, you're dragged." JoJo was smiling at him, smiling his white smile.

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Talmadge shook his head. "You're the one who's going to be dragged," he said. "Dorothy's dead."

"Dorothy—?"

"I found her out in the car. Somebody slipped her a jolt, didn't they? Well, her heart gave out."

"Murder, man!"

"That's the word for it. Murder. The law is going to call it just that, JoJo. But you and I know better, don't we? We know the real name for what you did. The real name for what you are—all of you who need those kicks to keep you alive. You don't drink blood the way they're supposed to do in the fables. You drink the essence, the vital energy."

Now the others were standing around the table, making a ring of white faces in the darkness, and Talmadge could hear them muttering.

"What gives with this cat? Monkey on his back?"

"Sounds like a gorilla, maybe."

"Dig him, JoJo?"

JoJo stood up. His voice was low, but it echoed hollowly in the empty ballroom. "He's got real crazy news. Dorothy's dead."

"The chick? But we were laughing it up in the car, just this last break—real groovy."

"The needle slipped."

"Oh-oh!"

"This cat is purring murder. He's ready to run to the law and do a vocal."

"Can't have that, man."

"And that's not all she wrote. Dig this. Cat thinks we're vampires."

"Vampires?"

"You know. Those real gone characters, they pad down in coffins."

"Man, that's the most!"

"What we gonna do?"

"Well, we can't let him sing."

"We got to ditch that chick before we blow town."

"Why not ditch 'em both?"

"Now?"

"Now."

Talmadge started to get up, but JoJo Jones pushed him back. Then somebody was behind him, holding his arms. And somebody else put a big cold hand over his mouth and held it there. It didn't cover Talmadge's eyes, though, and he could see the others advancing on him, holding their instrument cases ready. As they got closer, he could smell the charge.

Then they were hitting him, and he tried to struggle but it was no good. They hit him silently but very hard. Just before he passed out he thought he could feel something sting against the side of his throat, and a voice from far away said, "Maybe he has something there, Dad. We ought to try this vampire kick."

After that there was a long pause. From time to time Talmadge would come to, long enough to realize that things were happening. Once he was being carried, and once he was jolting along in a car . . .

The last thing Talmadge heard was JoJo's voice, chuckling as he murmured, "Dig that crazy grave!"

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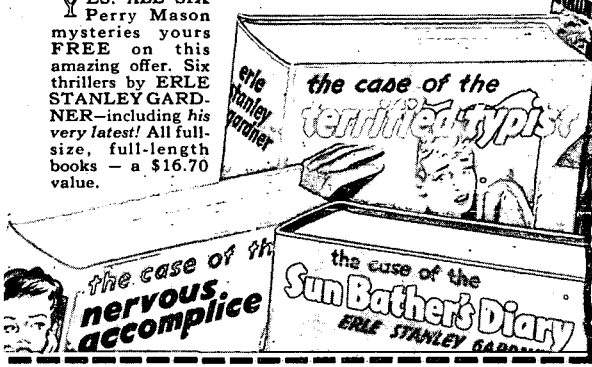

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Perry Mason h ace up his sleeve surprise witness counting on to sa client from the But she turns the trial—as the witness *for the*

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